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Routledge Handbook on Israeli Security

Edited by Stuart A. Cohen and Aharon Klieman

Routledge Handbook on Israeli Security

The *Routledge Handbook on Israeli Security* provides an authoritative survey of both the historical roots of Israel's national security concerns and their principal contemporary expressions. Following an introduction setting out its central themes, the *Handbook* comprises 27 independent chapters, all written by experts in their fields, several of whom possess first-hand diplomatic and/or military experience at senior levels. An especially noteworthy feature of this volume is the space allotted to analyses of the impact of security challenges not just on Israel's diplomatic and military postures (nuclear as well as conventional) but also on its cultural life and societal behavior.

Specifically, it aims to fulfill three principal needs.

- The first is to illustrate the dynamic nature of Israel's security concerns and the ways in which they have evolved in response to changes in the country's diplomatic and geo-strategic environment, changes that have been further fueled by technological, economic and demographic transformations;
- Second, the book aims to examine how the evolving character of Israel's security challenges has generated multiple – and sometimes conflicting – interpretations of the very concept of “security”, resulting in a series of dialogues both within Israeli society and between Israelis and their friends and allies abroad;
- Finally, it also discusses how areas of private and public life elsewhere considered inherently “civilian” and unrelated to security, such as artistic and cultural institutions, nevertheless do mirror the broader legal, economic and cultural consequences of this Israeli preoccupation with national security.

This comprehensive and up-to-date collection of studies provides an authoritative and interdisciplinary guide to both the dynamism of Israel's security dilemmas and to their multiple impacts on Israeli society. In addition to its insights and appeal for all people and countries forced to address the security issue in today's world, this *Handbook* is a valuable resource for upper-level undergraduates and researchers with an interest in the Middle East and Israeli politics, international relations and security studies.

Stuart A. Cohen is a graduate of Oxford University and Professor Emeritus of Political Studies at Bar-Ilan University, Israel. His current research focuses on military–societal relations in Israel. His most recent book is *Divine Service? Judaism and Israel's Armed Forces* (2016).

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Introduction

Modern Zionism, marking the return of the Jewish people to world history and politics, has meant above all else securing a safe haven. A place where Jews need no longer suffer the individual and collective insecurities that characterized nearly 20 centuries of Jewish defenselessness. Zionism set out to provide Jews with a refuge; somewhere they could sink roots and confidently lead a normal, productive life out of harm's way.

This imperative for guaranteeing a safe, secure shelter for the perpetually itinerant, suffering Jew finds earliest expression in the closing sentences of *Der Judenstaat*, the inspirational pamphlet in which Dr. Theodor Herzl in 1896 announced the renaissance of Jewish nationalism. "We shall live at last as free men on our own soil, and in our own homes peacefully die." With this minimal precondition met, "The world will be liberated by our freedom, enriched by our wealth, magnified by our greatness. And whatever we attempt there for our own benefit will redound mightily and beneficially to the good of all mankind."¹

Approaching the third decade of the twenty-first century, more than 120 years since Herzl proclaimed his vision and after over seven decades of sovereign statehood, there are grounds for claiming that the State of Israel has long since crossed his threshold for achieving an acceptable level of national security. In keeping with Herzl's conviction that "if you will it, it is no dream," Israelis can point with pride to their country as a Jewish national home and vibrant center of Jewish cultural endeavor. Israel is acknowledged worldwide to be a working model for social welfare programs, water desalinization projects, and for agricultural innovations that have caused the desert to bloom. It possesses the Middle East's strongest army and only functioning democracy; it is both a start-up nation and a light unto the nations. A unified Jerusalem is the eternal capital of an integral Land of Israel. All of these attainments are today seemingly part of the objective Israeli reality.

Moreover, now reconstituted in their ancient biblical homeland, Israelis are at peace with at least two of their immediate Arab neighbors, maintain a robust high-tech economy marked by sustainable growth, possess a proven conventional military capability and, lingering ambiguities aside, their own credible deterrent nuclear capability. To cap it all, they also enjoy special relationships with the United States superpower and with world Jewry. Lying at the very core of the original Zionist nation-state idea, Herzl's dream of Jewish normalcy – of a strong, energetic, independent Jewish political and territorial entity capable of defending itself – would surely seem to have come to fruition. This positive and flattering impression is reinforced by no less an authoritative source than Israel's own Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, who praises the country's security services and government for pursuing "a vigorous and responsible policy" that has in recent years made Israel "quieter and more secure than it has been in decades."²

It is all the more puzzling therefore to find the theme of perceived individual and collective

insecurity so prevalent and so pervasive in Israel's contemporary life and its social and cultural discourse. Indeed, concern with insecurity at times verges on a national obsession, with expressions of alarm about clear and present dangers vying for attention with dire predictions voiced periodically, both at home and abroad, as to the country's precariousness and lack of longer-term staying power.

Moreover, telltale signs of insecurity abound, providing constant daily reminders to Israelis of the unrelieved need for alertness. Perhaps the most routinized of those cues is the statutory state of emergency, enacted by the Provisional Council of State on May 19, 1948, just four days after Israel's founding, and still ratified on an annual basis by the *Knesset* (Israel's legislature) virtually without debate. More pronounced for individual citizens are such tangible and mundane indicators of their vulnerability to possible terrorist attacks as the ubiquitous armed guards posted at the entrance to super markets, restaurants, cinemas, nurseries, playgrounds and schools, and at bus stops, airport terminals and tourist sites.

Open pledges to "incinerate" and to "eradicate" the Zionist entity, voiced almost daily by leaders of the Palestinian *Hamas* terrorist organization on Israel's southwestern border and by those of the Islamic Republic of Iran over its northeastern horizon, hardly contribute to any sense of either normalcy or tranquility. Nor does having to function uneasily in the shadow of an arsenal of rockets, estimated to now number over 120,000, located in the Lebanon and poised to strike any target in Israel, civilian as well as military.

To be sure, learning to live with insecurity is not unique to Israel but is a condition endemic in today's world to all societies and countries. That, surely, is one of the prices to be paid for inhabiting an anarchic international system that continues to be incapable of providing security as a collective good, a situation that leaves self-defense as the only realistic default option. This said, when measured on a sliding scale of security–insecurity, Israel stands out for the level of its *perceived* vulnerability. After all, it is the only country in the world whose enemies, near and far, challenge its very right to sovereign existence and openly articulate a determination to reverse the course of recent history. Specifically, they threaten to return the Jews to their former, pre-1948, stateless condition, leaving Zionism a failed experiment.

That contemporary Israel ranks as one of the most militarized and least secure of the world's countries is certainly a far cry from Herzl's idealized early vision. *Der Judenstaat*, one notes, alluded merely to the possible need for a miniscule armed force, whose principal task would be to preserve order. In the utopian novel that Herzl published under the title *Altneuland* (German: "Old–New Land") in 1902, and in which he fleshed out his predictions for the directions soon to be taken by the Jewish-governed New Society, he had one of his protagonists blandly proclaim "There is no army."³ Israel's reality, of course, is radically different – so much so that the country has long had the unenviable distinction of being considered a textbook example of a "nation in arms," with all that the term implies in the sense of the blurring of conventional distinctions between the "civilian" and "security" sectors of society.⁴ That reputation continues to be well-deserved. No aspect of Israeli life is divorced from the quest for safeguards against danger, a situation that has resulted in the coupling in domestic discourse of "security" with almost every imaginable dimension of civilian life. Common talk is of peace and security ... West Bank settlements and security ... foreign trade and security ... security and democracy ... Israeli Arabs and security ... international law, human rights and security ... cement imports to Gaza and security ... the arts and security ... education and security. The list is endless.

This dominance of security in Israeli consciousness immediately poses a set of five questions. These inform the present *Handbook* and the original essays by each of the authors who have

contributed to it. They, like our readers, may be of divided opinion, and are invited to explore the subject in greater depth and from different perspectives. Some, by taking issue with this arguably obsessive and unwarranted concern at national insecurities; others, by regarding this concern as entirely warranted by circumstances.

First, which circumstances particular to the Israeli context might account for this singular, and what at times might appear to be excessive, preoccupation with security? Second, whatever the causal explanation or explanations, how has this primacy of national security impacted on the country and been interpreted by different elements of society, not just the secular Jewish males who have traditionally comprised the country's mainstream and principal reservoir of elites, but also – and perhaps especially – religious Jews, Israeli Arabs and women? Third, what coping mechanisms enable Israel and Israelis to debate, formulate and execute security-related policies while continuing to bear the psychological and material burdens of security without experiencing the trauma of system breakdown?

Parenthetically, it is here pertinent to note that, rather amazingly, and in seeming defiance of accepted social science theories about individual, communal or national dysfunction in the face of chronic stress or repeated wars and crises, reputable surveys confirm not only a dramatic increase in the quality of life in Israel over time, but also a high sense of collective well-being. Indeed, as of late 2017 Israel ranked 11th in the United Nations' annual World Happiness Report on 156 countries.⁵

Fourth, can a preliminary and necessarily tentative balance sheet be compiled of costs incurred by Israel alongside benefits accruing as the result of not being left to live in peace and of still being compelled to search for reasonable, assured security? Lastly, based upon the country's experience and the 27 original studies offered here, is Israel *sui generis* – in a category of its own; exceptional in the nature, multiplicity and severity of its security dilemmas – or, on the contrary, altogether unexceptional, and therefore worthy of closer comparative study and further analysis?

The structure of this *Handbook* reflects its focus on these five themes. As editors, our purpose in this introduction is not to compress the contents of the entire volume into the space of a few paragraphs. Rather, we here seek to outline the parameters that inform the body of each section and thus provide it with coherence and cohesion.

Israel's security prism

We submit for preliminary consideration that one of the most compelling explanations for Israel's security behavior is the commanding hold of cumulative Jewish history on the national psyche. Even when enjoying independent statehood, during what are conventionally termed the first (i.e., Biblical) and second (post-Biblical) Jewish commonwealths, the Children of Israel had been marked out as “a people that shall dwell alone and be of no account amongst the nations” (Numbers 23:9), a designation that encapsulated the precariousness of their existence as a minority group.

Powerlessness would become the most appropriate term for characterizing and summarizing the Jewish condition.⁶ Especially once Roman legions devastated Jerusalem, destroying the second Jewish temple in the year 70 CE, and then, six decades later, suppressed with unbridled savagery a desperate armed rebellion led by Shimon Bar Kochba. This represented the last concerted attempt at regaining Jewish sovereignty for nearly two thousand years.

Following these twin disasters, Jews seemed forever condemned to live in small, dispersed and subject communities, scattered haphazardly in a world dominated by other religious faiths, Great Powers and visceral Jew haters. Those circumstances may account for the fact that throughout the long chronicle of the Diaspora there would be hardly a single generation of Jews – each convinced it faced the very real threat of imminent extinction – that did not voice concern at constituting the last link in the chain of the entire history of the Jewish people.⁷

Subjected to the whims of oppressive gentile rulers and foreign nations, the number of survival options available to Diaspora Jews was severely limited. Abject subservience was one – a strategy that found expression in the insistence with which post-destruction rabbinic teachings emphatically renounced militancy as a path to security and instead preached the virtues of non-belligerence. To that end, Israel's earliest military memories, including Biblical tales of stirring martial valor, were subjected to irenic exegeses and thereby virtually erased from the national consciousness.⁸

Another option, pursued no less relentlessly, was flight: a phenomenon that gave rise to the image of the constantly wandering Jew, endlessly in transit. Together with family and belongings, he was forced to constantly move from one temporary sanctuary to another, *en route* (it has been suggested) practicing a form of self-selection designed to ensure the survival of those endowed with the cerebral gifts for the study of the canonical texts (collectively known as *Torah*), and for interpreting and ritually fulfilling the letter of the Law required for national endurance.⁹ The third option – invariably pursued in tandem with the first two – was prayer, deeply believed (and until the advent of modernity, almost universally so) to be the medium that would hasten the advent of deliverance through the agency of the promised Messiah.

Down through the ages, successive generations of Jews placed their trust for salvation in the Almighty, who in their morning liturgy they beseeched to: “Look from heaven and see how we have become an object of contempt and derision among the nations; we are regarded as just sheep brought to the slaughter, to be slain and destroyed, or to be beaten and disgraced.”¹⁰

Early Zionist thinkers and educators certainly made every effort to “turn the page,” so to speak, by confidently pointing to self-help, political action and statecraft as a more immediately effective path to national security.¹¹ Deeply conscious that, by the late nineteenth century, the danger of assimilation was compounding the threat of extermination, they sought to arrest both scourges by re-kindling Jewish nationalism and thereby distancing future generations from what later historians were to term “the Diaspora condition” and the “lachrymose conception of Jewish history,”¹² which witnessed “all darkness and no light.”¹³ So bold was that design in its conception, and so relentless were the Zionists in its pursuit, that there exists an understandable tendency to exaggerate their achievements and, altogether, to overstate the extent to which the new (Israeli) Jews and Jewesses differ from their diaspora grandparents.

In fact, however, for all Zionism's numerous intellectual and practical attainments, suspicion and insecurity vis-à-vis the outside, non-Jewish orbit remain an integral part of Jewish history's legacy for present-day Israelis. Their basic insecurity mindset is reinforced not just by the undisguised enmity of the Arab world but also, sometimes in the same breath, by the indelible experience of the Holocaust. The systematic extermination of European Jewry undoubtedly constitutes the single most profound and most indelible message of the Jewish past, and one that is in Israel a topic of deliberately formalized memorialization and a constituent ingredient of the country's civil religion.¹⁴ In the deeper recesses of every Israeli's mind is the haunting question: “What if we lose our alertness, our vigilance, our balance, our sanity even for a single moment.” This, from a survivor of the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps just shortly after

Israel's 50th anniversary, yet just as relevant in the seventh decade of Jewish sovereignty.¹⁵ In this sense, the Zionist revolution has changed little. In the pre-State era, quoting again from Herzl, prolonged persecution may have “overstrained our nerves” and denied Jews their right to security. Arguably, statehood and the necessity to engage in eight recognized wars, two Palestinian *Intifadas* and an endless round of low-intensity armed conflicts has had the similar effect of overstraining Israeli nerves, thereby helping to explain why security continues to dictate the national agenda.

Suffice to say that Israelis scarcely require any reminder of their “return to Zion” having embedded them at the epicenter of a region synonymous with political upheaval, sectarianism and religious extremism, indiscriminate terror, economic inequality and underdevelopment. This witches' brew is further compounded by the Middle East's notoriously permeable borders, penchant for advanced weaponry and military buildups and, not least, plenitude of major regional actors still unreconciled to the presence of a non-Muslim, non-Arab implanted Jewish state in their midst.

Despite the fervent wish of political Zionism's founders to escape Jewish history, it is this inhospitable, hostile external environment which contributes to a siege mentality and which dictates the military-operational dimension of Israel's defense doctrine. When note is also taken of the close proximity and proliferation of intermediate range missiles, with the warning time measured in seconds, it becomes even easier to comprehend why Israel remains a nation in arms, however great the cost.

Debating and framing security

Lest there be any doubt, vigilance and the chase after elusive security continue to extract a heavy price from Israelis. Of the many forms assumed by that price, by far the most poignant is the human toll of 23,646 IDF (Israel Defense Force) servicemen and servicewomen killed in defense of the country as of 2018, plus the 3,134 civilian victims lost to terrorism, in addition to thousands more of wounded and disabled. Then there are the incalculable economic opportunity costs in such non-military sectors as health, welfare, housing and education due to the diversion of resources to defense requirements. Even less amenable to precise measurement are the psychological consequences of living with insecurity and tension, although these certainly abound. Researchers identify decidedly dysfunctional symptoms such as aggressive and even violent behavior, road rage, anxiety, stress and cumulative exhaustion, leading, in turn, to the known pathologies of instant gratification and impatience mirrored in urgent calls for “peace now” or “messiah now.”¹⁶

Supplementing this list is the two-fold danger inherent in public and leadership definitions of existing or emerging security situations. On the one hand, the risk of denial – of underestimating an objectively acute situation, illustrated in the 1973 Yom Kippur War intelligence failure, when Egyptian–Syrian intentions to launch a large-scale joint military offensive were entirely misread and/or overlooked.¹⁷ On the other hand, and at the opposite extreme, is the risk of overestimating the severity or urgency of a security situation, artificially precipitating rather than forestalling a direct military confrontation, as some have retrospectively argued with regard to the 2006 Second Lebanon War.¹⁸

Debating security before, during and even after policy decisions are actually taken is therefore critical in Israel's case, just as is the decision-making process itself, precisely because the stakes

are so high, the margins for error so narrow, the decisional time so short and the safety net so thin or non-existent.

In an open, pluralistic and opinionated society like Israel's, security-related issues predictably spark a lively exchange of viewpoints, pro and con, over government policies. Because bureaucratic "homeland security" measures imposed within the law can too easily infringe on basic freedoms and, like arbitrary or excessive "security checks," intrude on privacy, thus conflicting with democratic norms, the security discourse in Israel is much wider than ever before, extending well beyond any closed circle of civil-military elites. Ever since 1948 (and before) that discourse has also found artistic expression in Israeli works of literature and drama, which are consequently imbued with security representations that both reflect and help to shape public attitudes. The multifaceted feature of the Israeli discourse has more recently been supplemented by the emergence of new, technologically driven mediums of social communication, which to a large extent have replaced the traditional press as the preferred means for the expression of public opinion.¹⁹

With respect to this ongoing national security debate, two things are especially noteworthy. First, the diversity of interests and special interest groups within Israeli society; the competing schools of thought from hawkish to dovish, at times ending in consensus, at other times in polarization; the sheer number of easily accessible social and electronic media, public platforms and research institutes for conducting this security discourse.

The second feature worthy of note is how a highly centralized decisional process stands out in such sharp contrast with the inclusiveness of the public debate. Here, what characterizes the Israeli institutional and procedural system for framing, evaluating and then selecting from among security options is its restrictiveness. In descending order, authority has passed almost unnoticed and virtually unopposed in the legislature from the full 120-member *Knesset* parliamentary plenum to a much smaller Committee on Foreign and Security Affairs (note, again, the twinning of subjects in this body's title) and thence to a string of sub-committees that invariably conduct their deliberations under conditions of strictest secrecy.

In the executive branch, a similar process is apparent, with authority devolving over time from the full governing cabinet to a downsized Ministerial Committee on National Security or "inner cabinet" limited to perhaps ten direct participants. A landmark amendment to "Basic Law: the Government," passed on 1 May 2018 but subsequently rescinded by the inner cabinet, foreshadowed a time when the power to take military action possibly leading to war in Israel's name would under "extreme circumstances" be reduced still further – and vested in just the Prime Minister and the Minister of Defense.

Any number of factors – extending from the unwieldiness of decision-making in large governmental bodies compounded by irresponsible security leaks to the possible immediacy of the need to issue authoritative policy directives – have been offered as justification for the process whereby the number of participants in formulating national security policies has thus been narrowed. None of these suggestions, however, has been persuasive enough to alleviate the additional sense of insecurity generated by the knowledge that, *in extremis* and should a future prime minister also serve as minister of defense (as did Ben-Gurion and several of his successors), the country's fate could come to reside in the hands of a single fallible individual.

Irrespective of the size and formal composition of the policy forum at a given moment, two influences, one internal and the other external, increasingly govern its deliberations. The former calls attention at home to the powerful domestic Israeli defense establishment and its associated "networks," which together play a pivotal role in any, and all, matters pertaining to security in

the broadest sense, upon which their overall input is profound.²⁰ The external reference is to the United States and its proven ability to sway the course of Israel's security debate and, ultimately, the country's choice of options.

Parallel with the domestic ascendance of the experts in security (the IDF, the Ministry of Defense and the two primary security services, designated the *Shabak* and the *Mossad*), the US–Israel relationship has evolved to the point where it is hard to imagine decisions affecting Israel's own national security being adopted in Jerusalem before prior consultation with Washington. Altogether, Israeli policy makers have become accustomed to the need to weigh carefully American interests, advice and preferences – whether they be conveyed by the White House, Congress, the US media and/or spokesmen for American Jewry.

Pursuing and augmenting security

As Israel's principal ally and guarantor of its qualitative military edge, the United States continues to play a role as security policies move from decision to implementation. As political realism dictates, however, coordinating with and oftentimes working through American diplomats and defense officials is only one, albeit one of the most effective instruments and agencies employed by Israel – internally and abroad – in laboring to overcome or at least cope with insecurities. Since security, like charity, begins at home, the first order of business is to define, constantly reassess and periodically update the national security doctrine in light of changing circumstances.

Pursuing this task of incrementally securing security on both fronts, foreign and domestic, involves operating in different channels and utilizing an assortment of means. In this section of the *Handbook*, several are singled out for closer analysis. Investing greater efforts at building psychological resilience on the civilian home front by boosting morale and strengthening defenses. Liberalizing an Israeli military culture that has in the past disadvantaged women, alienated the Israeli Arab population and been slow to accommodate potential ultra-Orthodox draftees. Sustaining high economic development and growth rates while reducing where possible Israel's defense burden. Staying at least one technological step ahead of Israel's adversaries in harnessing new, innovative sciences to the electronic battlefield. Adapting computerization and artificial intelligence cybernetics, pilotless as well as stealth aircraft, and a combination of conventional and nuclear deterrence to meet present and prospective security needs. Expanding the country's network of diplomatic, commercial and strategic ties – tacit as much as official – that extend beyond the US superpower and lay the foundations for the creation of other security partnerships, both regional and extra-regional.

Costs and benefits

No *Handbook* on a country's national security would be complete without considering both the costs of its attainment and the possible side benefits, if any. This is surely true of Israel in struggling to reach tolerable levels of, again, *perceived* safety while (to borrow from one of our authors) managing somehow to be more Athens than Sparta.

The debit side of the ledger must surely reference Israelis' perceptions of themselves as besieged and as doing their best to act with restraint in self-defense. In their own eyes, their measured responses to both verbal aggression and physical provocation place them at a serious

disadvantage in the contest for world public opinion. In the eyes of outside critics, on the other hand, Israel stands charged with grossly exaggerating threats to its security, which are compounded in turn by its application of excessive force in violation of the principle of proportionality.

A second liability stems from the fact that underwriting security performance outweighs and often comes at the direct expense of social projects. The costs are not solely monetary. They also extend to preoccupying national leaders, drawing upon their limited energies and diverting their attention away from equally pressing domestic concerns. A third casualty has been the emergence of threats to the democratic process. As already noted, appeals to the bar of necessity – in colloquial Hebrew *ein bereirah*, a term that literally translates as “no choice” or “no alternative” – has justified an otherwise supremely hazardous centralization of discretionary power and authority, entrusting the entire country’s future to the rational judgment and steely nerves of at most a few political and military authorities. Likewise, and similarly citing as an excuse the convenient national security argument, officials of the state have at various times too readily encroached on individual and democratic freedoms.

Once the Israel Supreme Court began to rule against the legitimacy of such moves, as was increasingly the case after the 1990s, the (perhaps inevitable) result was a spiral of stand-offs between the judiciary on the one hand and the executive and legislature on the other. The former’s claims to embody and defend the nation’s moral and legal conscience were pitted against the latter’s declarations that they articulated the authentic *vox populi*.

Moving to the credit side of the balance sheet, security alarms in Israel’s case have had the same positive effect as those observed elsewhere, where natural disasters, life-threatening situations, national emergencies, acute international crises and enemy invasions have helped to stimulate group solidarity. Heightened security threats, both those successfully aborted and those ending tragically with a loss of lives, tend to draw out the best in Israelis as they seek consensus over dissent and hasten to rally around the flag.

By the same token, security and the exigencies it imposes help to account for Israel’s proven reputation worldwide for inventiveness and for the full mobilization of resources. Arguably, only the premium put on coming up with tactical and technological security solutions to real-world security problems explains how it is that Israel has become not only an archetypal “start-up nation” but also one of the world’s leading net exporters of security know-how and security equipment.²¹ Likewise, absent the security-driven necessity for international partnerships, it is unlikely that so small a nation would station accredited envoys in no less than 158 foreign countries.

Exceptional or unexceptional?

In introducing this Israel-centric *Handbook* to readers, it is tempting for the editors to represent Israel’s security challenges and responses as *sui generis* – as altogether unique and therefore in a category of their own. From there it is easy to pronounce “Israeli case closed,” the logical conclusion being that the Jewish State is so exceptional that no room is left for comparative analysis. Not incidentally, such is precisely the conclusion subscribed to by an overwhelming majority of Israelis, who are convinced that no other country or people could have quite such a huge security deficit. However, having the advantage of absorbing a great deal of insight from the contents of this collection of essays ahead of our readers, this inclination to regard Israel as a

nation apart is offset by appreciation for the counter-argument, which underscores the commonalities shared by Israel with other countries.

Israel is certainly not the only nation in the world currently compelled to confront security threats. Neither is it the only democracy having to do so. Given the absence of a global law-and-order enforcement agency, even the leading contemporary powers feel vulnerable to manmade attacks of one sort or another – on their territorial integrity, and on the lives of their citizens. Indeed, globalization, climatology and the scientific revolution threaten to bring in their wake unprecedented dangers and exposure to attack from different quarters, thereby heightening insecurity for all countries.²²

Consequently, in organizing this *Routledge Handbook on Israeli Security* we have attempted to adopt a less categorical approach. Wary of declaring Israel's security condition to be either entirely distinctive or wholly representative, we propose that in many respects it is hybridic: both similar and dissimilar in wrestling with its security dilemmas. From either standpoint – comparable or incomparable – Israel remains highly instructive, and is even worthier of close investigation today than was considered to be the case before the advent of the twenty-first century.²³

Each contributor has brought to this collaborative effort his or her perspective, practical or academic experience, expertise and dedicated, original research. We share with them confidence in the potential this bounded case study of Israel and *its* security has for inspiring further multidisciplinary research projects at both ends of the equation: on specific nation-state actors and on the general concept of “security.”

Nevertheless, above and beyond this professional hope, the various essays in this volume illustrate that their authors differ significantly over the validity for Israel's prioritization of security as well as its past record in single-mindedly pursuing this existential need. Similarly, they anticipate variant responses to the question plaguing Jews from time immemorial, “*halanetzach tochal cherev*” (Samuel II, 2: 26) – Are we fated to live constantly by the sword? Skeptics will most emphatically, even if apologetically, answer in the affirmative. Conversely, optimists will swear that all conflicts must end; that objectively there is a solution even for the Arab–Israeli–Palestinian dispute; that with persistence, earnest of intent and adept statecraft the warring sides will ultimately arrive at a negotiated and workable end-of-conflict.

One final word of reflection is in order. In the course of editing these scholarly essays, we have become highly sensitive to the sheer impossibility for any work of this kind to be ever fully up-to-date. As the country's history of the past 70 years amply demonstrates, the quest by Israel for minimum perceived security is forced to constantly evolve in response to unforeseen developments from different quarters, external as well as societal and internal. Indeed, even as this book was going through final editing during the dry summer months of 2018, the launching of incendiary kites and balloons from within the Gaza Strip – solely with intent to ignite destructive fires in neighboring Israeli settlements, farmland and nature preserves – has introduced yet another novel dimension into the country's national security equation, testing a new Israeli resilience. Notwithstanding this fluid environment, our purpose from the outset has not been to address current events, but rather to present a series of deeper analyses with the aim of guiding the reader – as we believe a Handbook should – to a better understanding of the multifaceted character of Israel's security dilemmas.

Let us welcome honest debate over what Israel should or must do in order to feel – at long last – secure and at peace with the world; secure and at peace with its Middle East neighbors; secure and at peace with itself. Meanwhile, the search for reasonable, perceived physical and collective national security continues unabated, and unfulfilled.

Acknowledgments

We were originally invited to edit this volume by Mr. James (Joe) Whiting, acquisitions editor for Middle East, Islamic and Jewish Studies at Routledge. We are indebted to him and his staff for their patience and professional support throughout its production. Last words of praise, are reserved, however, for our distinguished colleagues whose respective individual insights and cooperation have made this *Routledge Handbook on Israeli Security* both possible and promising.

Notes

- 1 The full text of Herzl's *The Jewish State* can be found in the Jewish Virtual Library at www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-the-jewish-state-quot-theodor-herzl.
- 2 Prime Minister's Office, "PM Netanyahu's Remarks at the Start of the Weekly Cabinet Meeting," December 31, 2017. <http://embassies.gov.il/bucharest/NewsAndEvents/Pages/PM-Netanyahus-remarks-at-the-start-of-the-weekly-Cabinet-meeting-31-December-2017.aspx>.
- 3 *Altneuland*, Book 2, Chapter 3. www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/quot-altneuland-quot-theodor-herzl. Better known from his earlier *Der Judenstaat* is this comment: "We shall keep our priests within the confines of their temples in the same way as we shall keep our professional army within the confines of their barracks. Army and priesthood shall receive honors high as their valuable functions deserve. But they must not interfere in the administration of the State which confers distinction upon them, else they will conjure up difficulties without and within."
- 4 The literature is surveyed in Stuart A. Cohen, *Israel and Its Army: From Cohesion to Confusion*. London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 1–13.
- 5 See "Bank of Israel Reports Dramatic Rise in Quality of Life in Israel," *Israel Hayom*, October 8, 2017. www.israelhayom.com/2017/10/08/bank-of-israel-reports-dramatic-rise-in-quality-of-life-in-israel/. Also, "Israel Ranks 11th in UN 2018 World Happiness Report, Palestinian Territories at 114," *Ha'aretz*, March 14, 2018. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-ranks-11th-happiest-country-palestinian-territories-at-114-1.5908427.
- 6 David Biale, *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*. New York: Schocken Books, 1988.
- 7 Simon Rawidowicz, *Israel: The Ever-Dying People and Other Essays* (ed. Benjamin Ravid). Cranbury, NJ: Associated Universities Presses, 1986, pp. 53–63.
- 8 Stuart A. Cohen, "Dichotomous Jewish Understandings of Security: Historical Origins and Contemporary Expressions," in: Chris Seiple, Dennis R. Hoover and Pauletta Otis (eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security*. London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 12–13.
- 9 Richard I. Cohen, "The 'Wandering Jew' From Medieval Legend to Modern Metaphor," in: Barbara Kirshenblatt Gimblett and Jonathan Karp (eds.) *The Art of Being Jewish in Modern Times*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008, pp. 147–175. On self-selection see: Maristella Botticini and Zvi Eckstein, *The Chosen Few: How Education Shaped Jewish History, 70–1492*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- 10 "Morning Service," in: Philip Birnbaum (trans. and annot.) *Daily Prayer Book*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1949, p. 114.
- 11 The principal stages in this formidable intellectual enterprise are masterfully covered in David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.
- 12 A capsule description used by Salo Baron in critiquing the school of history identified with nineteenth-century historian Heinrich Graetz. See Salo Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation: Shall We Revise the Traditional View?," *The Menorah Journal* 14 (1928): 515–526, p. 526.
- 13 Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, quoted by Peter Steinfelds, "Salo W. Baron, 94, Scholar of Jewish History, Dies," *New York Times*, November 26, 1989.
- 14 Charles S. Liebman and Eliezer Don-Yehiya, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1983, pp. 101–106, 137–138.
- 15 Naphtali Lau-Lavie, *Balaam's Prophecy: Eyewitness to History, 1939–1989*. Jerusalem: The Toby Press, 2015, p. 461.
- 16 Edna Lomsky-Feder and Eyal Ben-Ari, "Trauma, Therapy and Responsibility: Psychology and War in Contemporary

- Israel,” in: Aparno Rao, Michael Bolling and Monicka Bock (eds.) *The Practice of War: Production, Reproduction and Communication of Armed Violence*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2011, pp. 111–131.
- 17 Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005.
 - 18 This view was fully articulated in evidence to the official commission of enquiry established after the war (“The Winograd Commission”). See: *Doch ha-Va’adah Libdikot Eruyei ha-Ma’arakhah Bilevanon* (Hebrew: “Report of the Committee into the Lebanon Campaign”), “Final Report,” January 2008. www.vaadatwino.org.il/reports.html.
 - 19 Gadi Wolfsfeld, *Making Sense of Media and Politics: Five Principles in Political Communication*. London: Routledge, 2011.
 - 20 Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak, *Israel’s Security Networks*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.
 - 21 Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel’s Economic Miracle*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2009.
 - 22 See especially Part II (“Security Challenges”) of Miriam Dunn Cavelti and Thierry Balzacq (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Security Studies*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 137–233, which devotes individual chapters to synoptic studies of the global challenges represented by: terrorism and counter-terrorism; organized crime; migration and security; cyber security; war; ethnic and religious violence; energy security; resources, the environment and conflict; and pandemics and global health. Interestingly, not one of these comparative chapters refers to Israel at all.
 - 23 See: Daniel Bar-Tal, Dan Jacobson and Aharon Klieman (eds.), *Security Concerns: Insights From the Israeli Experience*. Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 1998.

Part I

The Israeli security prism

1

Free or fearful?

Zionism's responses to Jewish insecurity

Uriel Abulof

“All things are mortal but the Jew,” remarked Mark Twain, “all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?”¹ For many Jews this is a rhetorical question, evincing the everlasting bond between the one God and His Chosen People.² Still, the people might never have attained certainty in absolute faith, living since time immemorial with equally lingering doubt and deep insecurities. Consider Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*. Explaining Jewish life on the brink of oblivion and the verge of modernization, Tevye, the rooftop Jewish fiddler, tells us that it was “*Tradition*” (emphasis in the original) that helped the Jewish people to “keep their balance” while living on the edge, facing constant dangers posed by their largely non-Jewish surroundings.³ He may well be right. Bereft of their ancient homeland and lacking sovereignty, Jews in the Diaspora had turned their religious faith and practice into a “portable homeland” (as Heinrich Heine denoted of the *Torah*). Religion was the mainstay of Jewish identity and a source of solace in the light of ever-present dangers. This traditional, ethno-religious existence has endured for millennia despite numerous perils. At the dawn of modernity, the secure identity served as an existential bolster in European ghettos, Moroccan *mellahs* and in Russia's Pale of Settlement.

Tradition faced acute challenges, however. The modern winds of change – industrialization, urbanization, secularization and emancipation – threatened to throw Tevye's fellow fiddlers off the rooftop. While some held fast for dear life, seeking security in staying closer to God, other Jewish fiddlers fell to the ground. The fallen fiddler found it much harder to “know who he is, and what God expects him to do.” With tradition undermined, that precious sense of Jewish security was shaken. Those who survived the fall started to use their frail feet, a task both exhilarating and exhausting, for it quickly became apparent that while in theory many new options opened up, in practice many doors remained shut. Moreover, and as many fallen fiddlers began to realize, the ground beneath their feet was far from secure, triggering fear and anxiety, which called for new, modern solutions.

This is the backdrop to the rise of Zionism. At this profound level, asking about Zionist responses to the Jewish insecurity misses the mark: Zionism *itself* was a response to Jewish insecurity. Indeed, for most Zionists, it was *the* response, the only viable one. The fallen fiddlers, Zionism argues, should walk to Zion to renew their sovereignty: only then – and there – will they

find the coveted security, which will be still better than lodging on the rooftop. This time around, Jews will take matters into their own hands, and feet.

Still, as I propose below, while on important measures Zionism has been a remarkable success – ameliorating age-old Jewish insecurities – on others, it has been an abysmal failure. *Zionism, which promised the ultimate solution to Jewish insecurity, turned out to be its late modern incarnation.* Instead of assuring its citizens of their collective existence, Israel has added another dimension to Jewish fears and anxiety – dreading the possible demise of the Jewish State. Furthermore, for its opponents, Zionism not only failed to deliver a cure, but also turned out to be a poison, aggravating the insecurities of Jews and non-Jews alike – posing acute threats to both.

How has Zionism responded to the insecurity that it has bred? On a rather obvious plane, Zionists have labored hard to boost material security by building a strong army and economy. On a deeper, mental and moral plane – which is my main concern here – Zionism has submitted two responses. First, Zionists have tried to legitimate the Jewish state by endowing it with right and purpose in the eyes of Jews and non-Jews alike. However, mounting difficulties on the path to legitimacy have encouraged many Zionists to turn increasingly to another, bleaker response: delegitimization and fearmongering.

Thus, paradoxically, *Zionists leaders have underscored the very Jewish insecurity that Zionism sought to resolve, even if it has objectively subsided.* To draw again on the metaphor above, the first Zionist response urged the free fiddler to use his feet to walk towards the horizon – the meeting of the factual *is* and the moral *ought*. The second response, however, cultivated a fearful fiddler, who should run to take again shelter on the rooftop, near God, or fall further to a bottomless pit, believing that “no matter what, the whole world is against us” (often enough, the rooftop and the pit have gone together). Basking in the abyss to conceal the failure of pursuing the horizon, I conclude, undermines Zionism and the prospects of the Jewish people. Still, it is not too late to change course.

The ever-dying people: identity and polity in peril

In 1948, the year the Jewish State was born, philosopher Simon Rawidowicz (1869–1957) succinctly captured Jewish insecurity in his treatise on the “ever-dying people”:

The world has many images of Israel, but Israel has only one image of itself: that of an expiring people, forever on the verge of ceasing to be ... He who studies Jewish history will readily discover there was hardly a generation in the Diaspora period that did not consider itself the final link in Israel’s chain. Each always saw before it the abyss ready to swallow it up ... Each generation grieved not only for itself but also for the great past that was going to disappear, as well as for the future of unborn generations who would never see the light of day.⁴

Importantly, for Rawidowicz, the Jewish fear for the future does not concern merely *aspects* of Jewish existence – the people’s demographics, their beliefs, economic well-being and so on – but also concerns the *very existence* of the people. Indeed, few peoples and states have faced more mortal dangers than the Jewish people, whose experience of such threats stretches from the biblical narrative of slavery in Egypt to the extermination camps of the Holocaust. In the

newborn Jewish State, too, Jewish insecurity has abided. Israel is much smaller – geographically and demographically – and strategically more vulnerable than its current and potential rivals, many of whom not only refuse to recognize Israel’s existence but also explicitly call for its destruction.

Moreover, Rawidowicz effectively discerns two types of (in)security. One is explicit: fear for the people’s survival; another is implicit: confidence about the people’s identity. Every generation fearfully considered “itself the final link,” but was nonetheless sure of being such a “link in Israel’s chain.” The link to the past was robust, the future prospects bleak. Rawidowicz thus helps us distinguish between two key objects of existential, collective (in)security: identity and polity. We may feel unsure about who we are, about the collectivity we belong to (e.g., are we Libyans, is there even such a thing?). We may also sense that the physical–political survival of that collectivity is at stake (e.g., will Libya still exist, say, 20 years from now?).

In ethnonational politics, the identity/polity distinction resonates wide and deep. Collective identities involve a spatiotemporal sense of sameness, and ethnic identities engender this sense through the societal imaginary of an “extended family”: the individual identifies with historical “forefathers” and with contemporary “brethren.” Ethnic identity-security thus transpires through historical continuity and societal unity; its demise, through acute challenges to both. The past provides an ethnic identity with an anchor. Arguably, the deeper it is cast, the stronger the ethnic identification.

Facing the past, the community beholds its identity; facing the future, its polity. Some nations, the Jews included, consider their future physical–political existence perilous. Their “body politic” presents the community with a shattered prospect of their future, the awaiting “abyss without.” This physical–political abyss may be as deep as the total annihilation of the community, or so shallow as to suggest the peaceful replacement of one type of ethnonational polity with another (e.g., from ethnic sovereignty to consociational democracy). It is important to differentiate between these two depths and to track the intermediate possibilities. But it is equally crucial to understand that members of small nations often perceive a linkage between their physical–political existence and the latter’s various expressions.

How do people cope with such deep insecurities – about their identity, polity, or both? Mainstream (realist) security studies provide a partial answer. Reading security as the safety of the state vis-à-vis external threats, the way to boost security is plain: power. The more power you have, the safer you are. For the most part, this is “hard power,” that is, tangible assets, typically military and economic, which can bolster the state’s ability to defend itself against its enemies. Zionism has aptly applied such realist security measures. They matter far less, however, when it comes to identity insecurity and, as we shall see, may even fall short when it comes to insecurity about the survival of the people and their polity.

Can anything else be done about such fear?

Here again Rawidowicz comes to our aid. He tellingly titled his essay “The ever-dying people” to indicate the paradox of Jewish existence: this most fearful people is also one of the most abiding. Rawidowicz considered the two phenomena linked:

I am often tempted to think that this fear of cessation was fundamentally a kind of protective individual and collective emotion. Jewry has indulged so much in the fear of its end that its constant vision of the end helped it to overcome every crisis ... as if its incessant

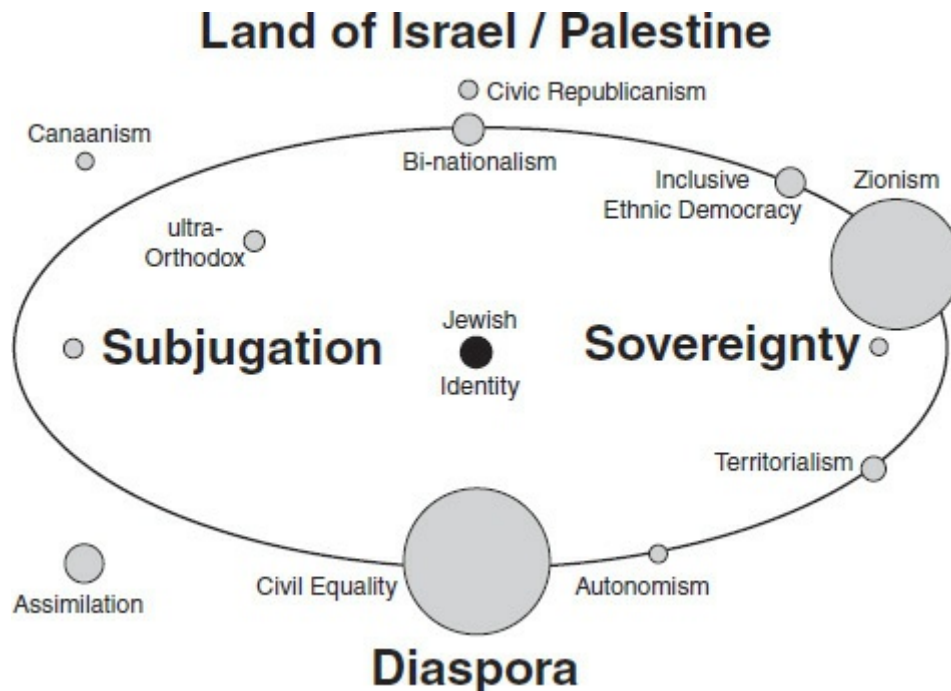
preparation for the end made this very end absolutely impossible.⁵

But Rawidowicz's suggestion that the Jewish people is effectively immortal (albeit fearful) was mostly retrospective. Could this paradox persist throughout modernity? Decades before Rawidowicz, historian Simon Dubnow (although sharing the former's view of the past) was doubtful.⁶ Indeed, looking forward, Dubnow thought modernity presented unparalleled dangers. Liberating Jews, for the first time in millennia, to pursue alternative modes of existence, individually and collectively, rocked modernity to the core their sense of self:

emancipation liberates the Jew from both his bondage and his Judaism at one and the same time. It seems as if the dreaded end of Israel has come; limb after limb is swept into the stream and swallowed up in the abyss of the Gentile world.⁷

What's to be done? For Dubnow, the answer was clear: "‘Autonomism’ – existence that is self-determined and the striving for inner national freedom – this is the name of the law, this is the revealed secret of the survival of the people of Israel."⁸ The key for Jewish survival, Dubnow argues, is not fear but freedom, but freedom (also) means you can opt out of the Jewish peoplehood.

Of course, adherence to Jewish identity need not mean subscribing to Zionism. Modernity undermined the ethno-religious Jewish security, thereby opening the gate to the rise of the ethno-national option, namely Zionism, but it also allowed other political alternatives. Indeed, as I try to visually illustrate below, within the "Jewish Ethnosphere" (Figure 1.1), Zionism's ethno-national call was contested by ideas and movements both in Palestine (e.g., bi-nationalism, inclusive ethnic democracy) and in the Diaspora (e.g., Autonomism, Territorialism, equality). Some challenges have gone beyond, or below, ethno-politics, either rejecting Jewish ethnicity (e.g., Canaanism, Assimilation) or distancing Jewish ethnicity from modern politics (ultra-Orthodox). Today, as indicated by different sizes of the distinct polities, Zionism in Palestine and equality in the Diaspora are the main loci of modern Jewish ethno-politics.



[Figure 1.1 The Jewish “Ethnosphere”](#)

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In what follows, I examine Zionism’s double insecurities – about identity and polity – wavering between fear and freedom.

Identity insecurity: Jewishness and Israeli-ness in modernity

Secularization propelled many Jews to explore non-religious affiliations and, in politics, the modern displacement of sovereignty from God to “the people” undermined Judaism as legitimating communal politics.⁹ For many Jews, faith and religious law (*Halacha*) no longer sustained their quest for everlasting meaning. Identity insecurity mounted as Jews increasingly doubted whether ethno-religious existence was suitable for the new era. Could one remain Jewish while exercising the growing, new freedoms to eschew religious practice? Disagreement ran deep and long, threatening to split the people.

Much depended on the modern distinction between *Judaism* (Jewish religion) and *Jewishness* (Jewish ethnicity), which were effectively coextensive before modernity. While obviously connected, Judaism and Jewishness are not the same, especially on the moral plane. The viability of modern Jewish identity and peoplehood draws on the Jews’ willingness and ability to identify as part of an ethnic “extended family” without subscribing to its religious core – to remain within the Jewish ethnosphere without, for example, observing *Shabbat*.¹⁰

For a time, Jewish identity appeared to be on the brink of existential fission. In the US before the mass immigration from Eastern Europe, as well as in central and Western Europe, many Jews chose to demonstrate patriotism to the state that had granted them emancipation by shedding all trace of ethnic Jewishness and stripping Judaism of its many beliefs and practices. The trend climaxed at the 1885 Pittsburgh conference of Reform rabbis, whose “Platform” declared: “We

consider ourselves no longer a nation, but a religious community.” Interpreting Judaism as an ideological *ism*, they underscored its universal moral creed as especially suitable to the new West, and the US.¹¹

Yet, somehow, Jewishness remained intact. Partly, this was because, in the West, emancipation did not necessarily involve de-ethnicization as a condition of full citizenship. Indeed, many Western Jews seeking civic integration also clung to their Jewish ethnicity. Acculturation is not assimilation: abandoning one’s language does not necessarily imply abandoning one’s people.

In addition, three other key factors worked to tip the balance in favor of preserving Jewishness worldwide. First, in Eastern Europe, modernity often reaffirmed ethnicity. Whether they immigrated or stayed put, favored ethnicity or subordinated it to other potent affiliations, nearly all Jews retained their sense of ethnic sameness.¹² Their Jewishness, albeit grazed and bruised, remained intact.

Secondly, modern anti-Semitism animated Jewish identity-security by seemingly trapping Jews in their *ethnie* even when they sought to abandon it. Many Jews saw modern anti-Semitism and the Holocaust as proof that even should they wish to leave their Jewishness, through religious conversion or assimilation, their environment would not let them.¹³

Finally, Zionism was both sustained by Jewish ethnic peoplehood and boosted it.¹⁴ As substantial as the profound doubts about Jewishness may have been, they were ultimately limited among modern Jewry, and among the Jews in Palestine were virtually non-existent. The Old *Yishuv* (pre-Zionist Jews in Palestine), the pre-state Zionist *Yishuv* and Israel’s Jews all clung to their Jewish ethnicity. To be sure, the tensions and crises have never ceased – with ongoing debates over “Who is a Jew?” and which group, among Israeli Jews, best embody the virtues and values of the people as a whole.¹⁵ However, almost all Israeli Jews have, and have been, identified as Jews, part of an “extended ethnic family”: a people whose ancestors had conquered and settled the ancient Land of Israel, only to be exiled, and whose descendants were now returning. Whether religiously observant or secular, they were all, together with Diaspora Jewry, part of the Jewish people.¹⁶ Most Jews in Israel have further identified as Zionists.¹⁷

In Zionist history, the Israeli and Hebrew identities have turned out to be weaker than the Jewish one. In 1952, Ben-Gurion speculated about the viability of Israeli identity, seeing its construction as crucial to nation building:

The State came into being, yet it did not find the nation which had awaited it. For centuries, the Jewish people had asked in prayer: “Will there be a state for the people?” No one had ever imagined the terrifying question: “Will there be a people for the state when it comes into being?” Yet that is the question of all questions for the State of Israel.¹⁸

Since peoplehood here pertains to the “Israeli people,” rather than the “Jewish people,” the question still looms unresolved. Israeli-ness has been increasingly caught in clashing interpretations: on the one hand, its civic understanding extols Israel as home to all its citizens; on the other, its ethnonational connotation delimits its appeal to Jews alone, or even just Zionists. The edge of the age-old Jewishness over the fresh Israeli-ness has resonated well in public opinion polls in recent decades, evincing growing identification of Israeli Jews as “primarily Jews” rather than as “primarily Israelis.”¹⁹ Nonetheless, this has yet to depreciate Israeli patriotism among Jews.²⁰

Jewishness has also trumped “Hebrew-ness,” which focuses on language and land. Key Zionist leaders have employed Hebrew identity as a bridge to the biblical founding myth of the people, skipping over millennia of supposedly deplorable Diasporic existence. This Hebraism gained some traction in the 1930s and 1940s, precipitating the emergence of “Canaanism.”²¹ However, like Israeliness, Hebraism eventually succumbed to the ethnic Jewish affiliation, a process greatly facilitated by the difficulty of including non-Jews in this imagery of a Hebrew people.²²

The years 1967–1973 marked a turning point in the public ascendancy of Jewish identity, often at the expense of Israeli-ness and Hebraism. The 1967 military victory facilitated a religious revival, and the 1973 War engendered “a deep crisis of leadership, values and identity. The nation filled with despair, self-doubt and existential fear. Let down by Israel, many sought comfort in Judaism.”²³ A generation later, the peace process of the mid-1990s foregrounded Jewish-Israeli identity tension, which peaked with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995 and Netanyahu’s electoral victory over Peres in 1996. The heated public discourse focused on the swelling gap between Jewish identity, with its growing religious–nationalist elements, and Israeli identity, which was associated with the secular left. Whereas the electoral slogan of the incumbent PM was “Israel is strong with Peres,” that of his opponent, used massively just before polling day, declared: “Netanyahu is good for the Jews.” Peres later commented: “We lost ... we are Israelis”; the winners “don’t have an Israeli mentality ... you can call them Jews.”²⁴

This discourse indicated a widening identity crisis that threatened to become fissiparous, although there was still no indication of a deeper identity insecurity about ethnic identity. The Israelis referred to by Peres did not feel detached from the “Jewish people” as a whole, but rather disassociated themselves, through shame and shaming, from the religious nationalistic utterances (and appropriations) of their people. Over the next few years, increasing numbers sought a new balance and new union of the two identities. This process generally marked the 2000s: a strengthening of ethnic Jewish identity alongside a weakening of Israeli identity, seen as one unique, problematic derivative of Jewish identity rather than as a challenge or threat to it.²⁵

By contrast, the passionate debate over unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip (2004–2005) did indicate a potential identity fission. At times, leaders and supporters of disengagement were depicted not as “brothers” gone astray who nevertheless remained part of the extended Jewish family, but as heretics whose actions betrayed the family core and who had thereby removed themselves from it. The clearest public expression of this was the opposition’s campaign slogan: “Jews do not expel Jews,” which (besides hinting that Jews may readily expel non-Jews) served to banish those carrying out the disengagement from the Jewish people.

Nearly a decade later, especially before and throughout the 2014 Gaza crisis, a related discourse resurfaced with a vengeance. Radical right-wing activists protested in the street and the social media against left-wing Israeli Jews whom they shamed as “traitors” to the Jewish, and Zionist, cause. Lacking a coherent moral outlook, these activists rarely clarified whether the “traitors” were “self-hating Jews” (thus nominally still part of the people) or effectively “gentiles” as the disengagement slogan implied.²⁶

Such revealing episodes aside, the overriding majority of the political right, including the religious right wing, do not typically see leftist Israelis as having detached themselves from the Jewish people. The sense of alienation (from the state and the Israeli left) has remained largely religious or political, not ethnic.²⁷ Concomitantly, most secular Zionists regard Israel as a “Jewish state,” not just “a state of Jews,” infusing the former with ethno-national connotation.

Polity insecurity: Jewish and Israeli survival in question

Security in ethnic Jewish identity has served as a powerful moral axis for Zionism and Israel. However, the flipside of Jewish ethno-national immortality – a strong belief in the continued survival of the Jewish people and their ethno-polity – has been far less vigorous. Modern Jewish movements, Zionism included, have sought to build upon the secure past to deliver “symbolic immortality” to Jewish existence.²⁸ Yet none has succeeded.

Prima facie, Zionism achieved in 1948 its primary goal: establishing an independent statehood for the Jewish people. In its War of Independence (1947–1949), Israel defeated both Palestine’s Arabs and Arab states. Less than a decade later, Israel had swiftly captured, and relinquished, the Sinai Peninsula. In 1967, Israel Defense Forces (IDF) defeated the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria (aided by Iraq and Lebanon) in a stunning six days, taking hold over Sinai, the Golan Heights, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and all of Jerusalem. Even the surprise attacks by Egypt and Syria on Yom Kippur 1973 did not succeed, and the IDF soon regained the upper hand.

At the same time, Israel has developed a sizeable and diverse nuclear arsenal, sustaining a nuclear monopoly in the region by attacking Iraq (1981) and Syria (2007), and indirectly through Western diplomacy vis-à-vis Iran (2015). Israel has forged an effective alliance with a global superpower, the US, which became hegemonic in the early 1990s. It attained peace treaties with two of its fiercest enemies, Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994), and was recognized by even the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), before negotiating for a settlement (1993–). The Second Palestinian *Intifada* (2000–2004) failed to force Israel’s withdrawal from the occupied territories, yet contributed to the political disintegration of the Palestinian society. More recently, in the wake of the Arab Spring (2011–2013), Israel’s Arab neighbors, especially Syria, have greatly weakened, with Sunni leaders holding fast to the conciliatory Arab Peace Initiative (2002, 2007).

Economically too, Israel has performed rather well. From its inception and throughout, its market has grown dramatically, becoming robust enough to contain, in the 2000s, the ill effects of the second *Intifada* and the global financial crisis. With recent gas discoveries, Israel has also become more energy self-reliant than ever.

Herein, however, lies Israel’s security paradox. The safer Israel has become, the more anxious Israelis have become. Overall, since the Holocaust, the Jewish people has gradually gained strength and security; it has never been more prosperous and powerful, its survival seemingly more assured than ever before. And yet, Israeli Jews have remained fearful, often more so than before.²⁹ Arguably, Israelis have increasingly opted for fearmongering politicians, urging conservative, religious and nationalist policies. Why?

Surely, part of the answer is that some objective dangers still linger, occasionally intensifying. Israel’s enemies are not entirely weak, and some are getting stronger. Its precarious nuclear monopoly notwithstanding, Israel remains vulnerable. Still, as I briefly show below, a complete answer requires a return to the intersubjective realm: the perception of threats, and how it has permeated Zionism’s politics of fear.

In his vastly popular personal narrative, *My Promised Land*, journalist Ari Shavit begins thus:

For as long as I can remember, I remember fear. Existential fear. The Israel I grew up in – the Israel of the mid-1960s – was energetic, exuberant, and hopeful. But I always felt that beyond the well-to-do houses and upper-middle-class lawns of my hometown lay a dark ocean. One day, I dreaded, that dark ocean would rise and drown us all. A mythological

tsunami would strike our shores and sweep my Israel away. It would become another Atlantis, lost in the depths of the sea.³⁰

This existential fear, Shavit tells us, is still very much with him – and, we may note, still very much with many other Israeli Jews. Indeed, Zionism had emerged and has evolved in the overlap between the belief in *netzach Yisrael*, eternal Israel, and *she'erit Yisrael*, the dread of destruction. This ethnonational movement sought to build a bridge to deliver the Jewish people from unsure mortal ground to “national immortality,” but the very bridge proved rickety and insecure – in the eyes of Zionists themselves.

Some 40 years after the establishment of Israel and after Rawidowicz wanted it to rescue the people from “consider[ing] itself the final link in Israel’s chain,” Israeli poet David Avidan sketched a portrait of the old–new Jew: “The Israeli self (and the Jewish one before it) is an existential hypochondriac. He requires, as part of this hypochondria, double and triple safety belts, both physical and psychological, to ensure that the Holocaust will not recur.”³¹ In spite of enduring efforts to lift the clouds of existential doubt from Zionism, the question mark continues to hang over it.

In the relative absence of an “internal abyss,” having no searing doubts about the essence of the ethnic self-Zionist mortality was mostly about the “abyss without,” and on weaving the safety net that separates the people and their state from the fall. Ariel Sharon, during his premiership, related the following anecdote about Israel’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion:

Jewish leader Nachum Goldmann once compared Ben-Gurion to a horse pulling a heavily laden wagon up a steep hillside – with an abyss to the right and an abyss to the left; it would take only one careless step for the wagon to fall. What’s to be done? The horse is blinkered so it does not see the abyss and can climb the slope safely. Former President Yitzhak Navon and erstwhile political secretary to Ben-Gurion responded that Goldmann did not know Ben-Gurion. Not only would he keep his eyes un-blinkered, but he would personally approach the edge of the abyss, look into it with eyes wide open and carefully measure its depth.³²

Ben-Gurion, Sharon, other Zionist intellectuals and activists from the elite and the masses all seem to have shared the perception of an abyss while arguing over its depth and the net above it.

Zionist insecurities about physical–political survival extend as far as Zionism itself. In 1933, Jabotinsky protested: “Ask a French peasant whether France is his country. These are axioms, not ‘problems.’ Only the spiritually handicapped with a Diaspora psyche made this into a ‘problem’ to be investigated and ‘proved’.”³³ Almost 70 years later, a similar frustration was voiced by Laborite Yossi Beilin, who urged reinforcing “the very thin ice [the recognition of Israel] on which Israel stands until it was sturdy enough to be walked on like floorboards.”³⁴ The two sayings are distinct: whereas Jabotinsky bewailed the Jewish people’s self-doubt about their right to the land, Beilin addressed the feeble external recognition of this right. No single straight line connects these utterances; still, another, fractal, thread links these words as a leitmotif: existential uncertainty. Overall, Jabotinsky’s France and Beilin’s floorboards have remained wishful thinking.

The external factors contributing to existential doubt have grown stronger in the twenty-first century. “The thing that scares me most,” said author David Grossman in 2003, following the outbreak of the second *Intifada*,

is losing my confidence in Israel’s existence. This doubt is ever-present. I think that

everyone living here lives simultaneously with the alternative that Israel may cease to exist. This is our nightmare. Over the years, we have refashioned the nightmare, wallpapered it, white washed it. And what happened here over the past two years as ideas, values and world views were greatly undermined, was that the possibility of Israel no longer existing suddenly became tangible. It was no longer a hallucination or a nightmare. There was a real possibility that this great heroic experiment simply was not to be. The possibility scares me terribly.³⁵

The media too played its part in fanning the flames of mortality. One weekend supplement of a leading newspaper (*Ma'ariv*) reverberated entirely to the beat of existential fear. Headlined "Do we have a future?," the different articles left the question open but evidently drove towards a "no."³⁶ Opinion polls likewise pointed to a high level of anxiety about the state's future filtering down to the public, who mostly occupied the middle ground of existential uncertainty between utter confidence in Israel's survival and absolute certainty in its demise.³⁷

The 2000s were not marked only by the second *Intifada*. The Second Lebanon War is especially revealing: fought against an enemy led by Hassan Nasrallah, head of *Hizbullah*, a leader epitomizing Israel's worst fears. Several days after Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon (May 26, 2000) he preached to his followers: "I tell you all: This 'Israel' with its nuclear weapons and the strongest air force in the region is more fragile and vulnerable today than a spider's web." Nasrallah's spider's web thesis presented a bleak contra to Israel's longstanding *Iron Wall* policy of steadfast endurance. The deep indelible sense of collective mortality, despite all efforts to allay it by right and by might, may have precipitated one of the offensives in the Second Lebanese War: the attempt to capture Bint Jbeil, the southern Lebanon town where Nasrallah had made his spider's web speech. The military operation was code-named "Steel Webs."³⁸

Is there an alternative to fear – in politics and military affairs alike? I believe Zionism's answer was, and can still be, affirmative. Freedom – the unique human capacity to choose, reason, act and take responsibility – stands at the heart of the Zionist revolution, has underpinned its coping with fears, and can still become a beacon of hope. Staring at the abyss below, Zionists have weaved a security net made not only of material threads but of moral fabric as well.³⁹

The eminent Zionist thinker Ahad Ha'am (1856–1927) wrote:

Our national sentiment is the reason for our existence, but our heart ... cannot find peace knowing the reason alone. It also yearns for an underlying purpose to our existence ... [The Jew must know] that he lives and suffers not only because he cannot die but because he must live.⁴⁰

Efforts to find legitimating rationales for the Jewish State have been a leitmotif of Zionism. In that vein, Ze'ev Jabotinsky complemented his celebrated *Iron Wall* essay with a second treatise: "The Morality of the Iron Wall."⁴¹ Morality, declared Jabotinsky, comes before everything else and Zionism is "moral and just" since it subscribes to "national self-determination" as a "sacred principle." Zionism survived and thrived by complementing the politics of power with the politics of purpose.

Will its leaders and public alike muster the courage to follow, once again, this path, and favor freedom over fear and bad faith?

Notes

- 1 Mark Twain, "Concerning the Jews," *Harper's Magazine*, New York, 1898, p. 535.
- 2 On the historical intricacies of the notional "chosenness" of the Jewish people, see Avi Beker, *Chosen: The History of an Idea, the Anatomy of an Obsession*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- 3 Jerry Bock et al., *Fiddler on the Roof*. New York: Limelight Editions, 1964, p. 2. The musical draws on Sholem Aleichem's "Tevye the Dairyman and other tales," originally written in Yiddish and first published in 1894.
- 4 Simon Rawidowicz, "Israel, the Ever-Dying People," in: Benjamin C. I. Ravid (ed.) *Israel, the Ever-Dying People, and Other Essays*. Sara F. Yoseloff Memorial Publications in Judaism and Jewish Affairs. Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1986, pp. 53, 56.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- 6 "Under the Sign of Histoicism," in: Lucy S. Dawidowicz (ed.) *The Golden Tradition: Jewish Life and Thought in Eastern Europe*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996, p. 233.
- 7 Quoted in Uriel Abulof. *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015, p. 131.
- 8 Simon Dubnow, *Nationalism and History: Essays on Old and New Judaism*. Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1958, p. 331.
- 9 Jews have practiced representative politics in various Diaspora communities, but this did not amount to espousing "popular sovereignty." Michael Walzer et al., *The Jewish Political Tradition, Vol. I: Authority*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.
- 10 Raphael Falk, *Zionism and the Biology of Jews* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Resling, 2006.
- 11 Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- 12 For an extensive examination of the tension between ethnic Jewish identity and other competing identities, and between Zionism and alternative political expressions, see Gideon Shimoni and Haim Avni (eds.) *Zionism and Its Jewish Opponents*. Jerusalem: The Zionist Library, 1990; Israel Bartal, "An Alternative to Government, State and Citizenship: Shimon Dubnow and Jewish Autonomous Rule," in: Israel Bartal (ed.) *The History of Local Jewish Self Government*. Jerusalem: The Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 2004; Judah Reinhartz, Joseph Salmon and Gideon Shimoni (eds.), *Nationalism and Jewish Politics*. Boston, MA: Brandeis University and Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Institute, 1996.
- 13 Shelly Tenenbaum and Lynn Davidman, "It's in My Genes: Biological Discourse and Essentialist Views of Identity Among Contemporary American Jews," *The Sociological Quarterly* 48 (2007): 435–50.
- 14 William Safran, "The Jewish Diaspora in a Comparative and Theoretical Perspective," *Israel Studies* 10 (2005): 305–60.
- 15 Myron Joel Aronoff, *Israeli Visions and Divisions: Cultural Change and Political Conflict*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989.
- 16 According to Guttman Institute reports for 1991, 1999 and 2009, 93% to 96% of the Israeli respondents felt they were "part of the world's Jewish people." Asher Arian and Ayala Keissar-Sugarmen, *A Portrait of Israeli Jews: Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews, 2009*. Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2012.
- 17 Polls indicate that 80%–90% of contemporary Israeli Jews consider themselves "Zionist" (*ibid.*, p. 69.). See also Zeev Ben-Sira, *Zionism Versus Democracy: Opinions and Values of Jewish Teens* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Magnes, 1995.
- 18 David Ben-Gurion, *Like Stars and Dust: Essays From Israel's Government Year Book* (Hebrew). Sede-Boker Campus: Ben-Gurion Research Center, 1997 [1952], p. 164.
- 19 In an extensive survey conducted in 2009, around one-half of Israeli Jews defined themselves primarily as Jews, and around 40% defined themselves primarily as Israelis (Arian and Keissar-Sugarmen, *A Portrait of Israeli Jews: Beliefs, Observance, and Values of Israeli Jews*, p. 63.). See also: Chanoch Daum (ed.), *What Are You More? Jewish or Israeli* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Yedioth Ahraonoth, 2003.
- 20 In the "Democracy Index for Israel 2011," 88% of the Jewish respondents (and 53% of the Arab respondents) indicated pride in being Israeli, but 76% of the Jews felt a sense of belonging to the country while only 35% of the Arabs did so. Tamar Hermann, *Israeli Democracy Index 2011* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Israeli Democracy Institute, 2011, pp. 103–7). See also Avner Ben Amos and Daniel Bar-Tal (eds.), *Patriotism: Love for the Homeland* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004.
- 21 Klaus Hofmann, "Canaanism," *Middle Eastern Studies* 47 (2011): 273–94.
- 22 David Ohana, *The Origins of Israeli Mythology: Neither Canaanites nor Crusaders*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012; Jacob Shavit, *The New Hebrew Nation: A Study in Israeli Heresy and Fantasy*. London: Frank Cass, 1987.
- 23 Ari Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel* (Ebook). New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2013.
- 24 Daniel Ben-Simon, *A Different Country: The Collapse of the Left and the Rise of the Right* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Aryeh Nir, Modan, 1997.
- 25 In a survey conducted at the end of 2001 by the Smith Institute, 48% of the Jewish-Israeli respondents stated that their primary identity group is "the Jewish people"; 36% felt that they belonged primarily to a group defined as "citizens of the State of Israel"; 53% said they would object to their children or grandchildren marrying a non-Jew. Around half of the respondents stated that the events of the past year had strengthened their Jewish identity (only 4% said it had been weakened) (Smith Institute October 18–22, 2001).
- 26 On Israeli discourse in the summer of 2014, see Eretz Acheret's special online issue (71), July 2014. <https://eretzacheret.org/issue/71/>

- 27 For example, 78% of Israeli settlers stated after the disengagement from Gaza that “the youth living in the territories must still enlist in the IDF,” and 66% of them stated that they had a “brotherly relationship” with the residents of north Tel-Aviv (29% felt alienated from them). Yedioth Ahronoth, February 2, 2006.
- 28 Moshe Hazani, “Netzah Yisrael, Symbolic Immortality and the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict,” in: Knud S. Larsen (ed.) *Conflict and Social Psychology*. London: Sage, 1993, pp. 57–70.
- 29 Among my key publications on this theme: Uriel Abulof, “National Ethics in Ethnic Conflicts: The Zionist ‘Iron Wall’ and the ‘Arab Question’,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (2014): 2653–9; Uriel Abulof, “Deep Securitization and Israel’s ‘Demographic Demon’,” *International Political Sociology* 8 (2014): 396–415; Uriel Abulof, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015; Uriel Abulof, “Conscientious Politics and Israel’s Moral Dilemmas,” *Contemporary Politics* 23 (2017): 34–52.
- 30 Shavit, *My Promised Land: The Triumph and Tragedy of Israel*. Shavit later admonishes those Israeli Jews who “were fooled by the Zionist success story,” so much so that “they lost sight of the existential risk embodied in the Zionist deed. Gradually they lost the concentration and caution required of those walking a tightrope over the abyss.”
- 31 David Avidan, “The Collective Israeli ‘I’ as an Existential Hypochondriac” (Hebrew), *Yedioth Ahronoth* (Hebrew Daily), September 5, 1986.
- 32 Ariel Sharon, “Prime Minister’s Speech at the National Memorial Ceremony for Paula and David Ben-Gurion,” November 21, 2004. www.pmo.gov.il/PMO/Archive/Speeches/2004/11/pseach2111.htm.
- 33 “The Soldier’s Covenant,” *The Yiddish Moment*, July 20, 1933.
- 34 *Ha’aretz* (Hebrew Daily), June 15, 2001.
- 35 *Ha’aretz*, January 10, 2003.
- 36 *Ma’ariv* (Hebrew Daily), February 15, 2002.
- 37 One year into the Second Intifada, 70% of Israelis claimed that they were anxious about the future of the country (“‘Gallup’ Poll,” *Ma’ariv*, September 14, 2001). See also the Israel Dialogue poll in *Ha’aretz*, September 15, 2004, and the poll conducted for the November 2003 Israel-Sderot Conference. After five more years of confrontation with the Palestinians, more than half of the Israeli respondents stated that they were anxious about the future existence of the State of Israel (54% in *Ma’ariv*, October 1, 2006; 57% in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, November 24, 2006); 45% declared that their anxieties had increased following the second Lebanon war and the Iranian threat.
- 38 IDF Chief of Staff Dan Halutz explained: “Bint Jbeil is the symbol of Hezbollah. Nasrallah spoke from there, and I suppose that in his next speech – if there is another one – he’ll choose his words carefully” (*Ha’aretz*, July 28, 2006).
- 39 Abulof, “National Ethics in Ethnic Conflicts: The Zionist ‘Iron Wall’ and the ‘Arab Question’”; Abulof, *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*.
- 40 Ahad Ha’am, *At the Crossroads*, Vol. 1 (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1948, p. 15; see also Jacques Kornberg (ed.), *At the Crossroads: Essays on Ahad Ha-Am*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1983.
- 41 I have enlarged on this matter in Uriel Abulof, “National Ethics in Ethnic Conflicts: The Zionist ‘Iron Wall’ and the ‘Arab Question’.”

2

Israel's post-1948 security experience

David Rodman

“In blood and fire, Judah fell; in blood and fire, Judah shall rise again,” declared the celebrated Hebrew poet Ya’akov Cahan (1881–1960) in his often-quoted Hebrew-language poem “*Biryonim*” (“Hooligans”). Although written in 1903, in response to the notorious pogrom of that year in Kishinev, Russia, in retrospect Cahan’s words foresaw conditions under which the State of Israel entered the world in 1948 and under which it has persevered since. The country proclaimed its independence in the midst of a war, and has been embroiled almost continuously in some form of armed conflict throughout its 70-year history.

Israel has fought nine wars. Six fall under the rubric of interstate wars (i.e., sustained, high-intensity conflicts involving at least one Arab state). The other three fall under the rubric of asymmetrical wars (i.e., sustained, high-intensity conflicts involving at least one Arab insurgent/terrorist organization). Between wars, the country has been engaged in various types of low-intensity conflict (LIC), including cross-border infiltration/border skirmishing, terrorism at home and abroad and civil unrest and insurgency in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Furthermore, Israel has faced the prospect of attack by weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Israeli defense policy makers¹ have traditionally divided these security challenges into two categories: “*basic*” security challenges – interstate war and WMD attacks threatening the country’s fundamental integrity; and “*chronic*” security challenges – collected under the rubric of LIC – threatening the public’s welfare but not the country’s survival.² Asymmetrical war, a twenty-first-century phenomenon, does not fit neatly into either category. Rather, it represents an intermediate-level challenge falling between basic and chronic security challenges.

Security challenges through the Six-Day War

During its first two decades, Israel fought three interstate wars: the 1947–1949 War of Independence, the 1956 Sinai Campaign, and the 1967 Six-Day War. Although it emerged victorious from the War of Independence, this grueling, back-and-forth contest exacted a grievous toll. Israel lost about 1% of its prewar Jewish population and suffered widespread economic and social hardship.³ Moreover, at the end of the war, the country’s security situation remained unpromising.

First, despite encompassing more territory than originally assigned to it under the terms of the 1947 United Nations (UN) partition resolution, the country lacked strategic depth and easily

defensible borders. Its major population centers, critical infrastructure (e.g., water and power facilities), and military bases lay concentrated in its narrow coastal plain, which was only 10 miles (16 km) wide at one point. Israel's borders were also long (in relation to its total area) and flat. Unable to seal the frontiers with the manpower at its disposal, the country could not prevent Arab armies or infiltrators from crossing its borders if they chose to do so.

Second, the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian armies enjoyed crucial quantitative advantages over the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Not only did they have more manpower to draw upon, but they also possessed easier access to modern arms.

Third, Israel emerged from the War of Independence without allies. During the intensifying Cold War of the 1950s, Western and Eastern bloc countries sought to curry favor with the Arab world, which controlled vast quantities of oil and occupied a strategic landmass. Concomitantly, to avoid alienating the Arab world, they typically sought to keep Israel at arm's length. Indeed, only during the Sinai Campaign did the country manage to secure allies (France and Great Britain) – but, even then, on a qualified, ad hoc basis.

Under Prime (and Defense) Minister David Ben-Gurion, therefore, Israel pursued what came to be called a “periphery policy.”⁴ This policy involved developing tacit, informal relationships with non-Arab regional states (Iran, Turkey and Ethiopia); non-Arab minorities (Kurds, Maronite Christians and African tribes in Sudan); and even one Arab state (Morocco). While these relationships, especially the one with Iran, produced some tangible security benefits for the country during its first decades (e.g., the acquisition of oil), they nevertheless did not directly reduce its security challenges.

By the early 1950s, the aforementioned variables – geography, numbers and allies – had fused to shape Israeli strategic culture.⁵ Offensive mobile warfare, with an emphasis on swift thrusts deep into an adversary's rear, concluded defense policy makers, offered the IDF the best prospect of winning wars quickly and cheaply. Particularly if wars were also either *preventive* (i.e., initiated to stop a latent threat from becoming a manifest threat) or *preemptive* (i.e., initiated to counter an imminent threat). Cross-border infiltration/border skirmishing, conversely, would be countered through a mix of defensive measures (e.g., fixed strongpoints and mobile patrols) and offensive measures (e.g., retaliatory raids into Arab territory).

Despite entering into truce agreements with Israel at the end of the War of Independence, the neighboring Arab states promised a “second round” of war to eradicate the “Zionist entity.” However, they were in no shape to act immediately on their pledge, as their armies had suffered crippling losses during the war, which explains why, during the first years of statehood, Israel's security predicament revolved around cross-border infiltration/border skirmishing. All of the country's frontiers, other than the one with Lebanon, were highly combustible.⁶ Fire was exchanged intermittently with Syria, usually because of disputes over territory claimed by both countries. But the most troublesome borders of all between the War of Independence and the Sinai Campaign were the Jordanian and Egyptian, where cross-border infiltration/border skirmishing accounted for most Israeli casualties during these years.⁷

Defensive measures alone could not prevent infiltration; hence, the IDF was tasked with conducting retaliatory raids against targets in Jordan and Egypt in an escalatory effort to induce them to uphold the 1949 truce agreements. While these raids helped to curb infiltration along the Jordanian border, they not only exacerbated the phenomenon along the Egyptian border but also precipitated a series of intense IDF–Egyptian army clashes. Thus, in the mid-1950s, defense policy makers, particularly IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan, concluded that only a decisive war with Egypt could bring an end to cross-border infiltration/border skirmishing.⁸

The countdown to that war began in 1955, when the Soviet Union agreed to supply a massive quantity of modern arms to Egypt,⁹ which defense policy makers believed would tip the Middle Eastern balance of power heavily against Israel. One faction, led by Dayan, pressed for an early preventive war designed to impede the Egyptian army's absorption of these arms. But another faction, led by Ben-Gurion, was wary of tackling Egypt alone and preferred a war scenario in which Israel possessed allies. That scenario finally materialized in 1956. France and Great Britain, angered by Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser's unilateral nationalization of the Suez Canal Company, as well as his support of anti-imperialist Arab nationalist movements throughout the region, encouraged Israel to join them in a war against Egypt. The campaign plan called for the IDF to engage the Egyptian army in the Sinai, while combined Franco-British forces seized and reoccupied the Suez Canal, and French aircraft helped to protect Israeli airspace.

Notwithstanding Anglo-French delays and occasional military setbacks, the IDF gave a good account of itself in the Sinai Campaign. In less than a hundred hours, Israeli forces captured all of the Sinai and Gaza Strip, where fast-moving IDF columns outfought or outflanked the Egyptian defenders. The IDF suffered fewer than 200 fatalities; the Egyptian army lost approximately 1,000 men.¹⁰

While American and Soviet pressure compelled Israel to withdraw to its prewar border, the Sinai Campaign still bestowed a number of important security benefits on Israel. First, it opened up the Red Sea to Israeli shipping, which strengthened the Israeli economy. Second, the war cemented a Franco-Israeli partnership, giving the country access to modern arms and helping to advance its nascent nuclear weapons/ballistic missile programs.¹¹ Third, it reduced the severity and immediacy of the country's security challenges. More than ten years would pass before the outbreak of the next interstate war. In the interim, the scope and intensity of cross-border infiltration/border skirmishing fell dramatically. Except for the "War over the Waters" – a series of sharp clashes along the Israel-Syria frontier in the mid-1960s during which the IDF foiled Syrian efforts to deny Israel access to the Jordan River's waters¹² – the country's borders were relatively quiet.

The calm, however, gave way to renewed border skirmishing in late 1966, which ushered in a train of escalatory events in spring 1967, of which the most consequential were Egypt's decisions to remilitarize the Sinai and to blockade the Straits of Tiran. This train of events essentially compelled Israel to go to war.¹³

By late spring, a warranted sense of acute insecurity, even of impending doom, gripped the Israeli public. The country's defense policy makers were as one in recognizing that Israel faced an imminent existential threat, differing only on how best to address it. Most of the IDF general staff favored a preemptive war sooner rather than later, arguing that delay would prove costly. Although Prime Minister Levi Eshkol's government preferred to give international diplomacy a chance to defuse the crisis, after a few weeks of fruitless talks, it conceded that Israel had no viable alternative to war.

The Israel Air Force (IAF) opened the war with a series of devastating strikes against the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian air forces, catching them by surprise and virtually annihilating them on the ground within a few hours, thereby assuring Israel of air superiority throughout the hostilities. Simultaneously, after breaking through Egyptian defenses in the Sinai and Gaza Strip, IDF ground forces outflanked their adversary and attacked the Egyptian army's rear. Aided considerably by a chaotic Egyptian retreat, the IDF conquered all of Sinai and the Gaza Strip in four days. On the central front, IDF ground forces captured the entire West Bank after the

Jordanian government ignored Eshkol's plea to refrain from combat. With Egypt and Jordan knocked out of the fighting, the IDF turned its attention to Syria, overrunning the Golan in less than two days. In one of the more lopsided victories in the annals of military history, IDF losses amounted to fewer than 1,000 men; the combined Arab armies lost 15–20,000 men.¹⁴

Security challenges through the Lebanon war

The Six-Day War bestowed two important security benefits on Israel. First, as a consequence of its territorial conquests, the country obtained unprecedented strategic depth and more easily defensible borders, especially along the southern and central fronts. Second, the war inaugurated a progressive expansion of the American–Israeli relationship.¹⁵

Nevertheless, Israel faced continuing threats, and the expectation of peace with the Arab world (best exemplified by Defense Minister Dayan's quip that he was waiting for a phone call from Jordan's King Hussein to discuss terms) proved illusory. As early as August–September 1967, members of the Arab League pronounced their “three noes” – no negotiations with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no peace with Israel. By that time, the country's borders had already begun to heat up. Created in 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) initiated an insurgency/terror campaign from both inside and outside the West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹⁶ Employing *defensive* (e.g., strongpoints and patrols) and *offensive* (e.g., cross-border raids) measures, the IDF was able not only to assert its control over the administered territories but also to inflict heavy losses on PLO forces operating from Jordan and, later, Lebanon. Israel, however, found it harder to deal with increasing acts of PLO terrorism abroad (e.g., airplane hijackings and bombings). Moreover, because King Hussein and Jordan seemed unwilling or unable to crack down on the PLO (at least prior to 1970) and Syria provided it with active support, the IDF became embroiled sporadically in intense border skirmishes with both neighbors.

The Israel–Egypt frontier was even more troublesome. While control of the Sinai had enhanced Israel's security by providing strategic depth, it had also diminished that security by motivating Egypt to engage in hostilities to secure the peninsula's return. From the summer of 1967 to the spring of 1969, this effort was restricted to intermittent artillery barrages and infantry raids across the Suez Canal. But in the spring of 1969 the Egyptian government decided to escalate the fighting, announcing the commencement of the 1969–1970 War of Attrition.¹⁷ The aim was to inflict massive casualties on the IDF through intensive, continuous fighting in an attempt to create conditions under which a cross-canal offensive would become a realistic proposition. For its part, Prime Minister Golda Meir's government sought to restore quiet along the canal without making concessions.

The War of Attrition differed fundamentally from Israel's other interstate wars in that it did not involve large-scale ground battles between armies. Hostilities consisted of artillery bombardments, infantry raids and air strikes across the Suez Canal. For the first few months of the war, defense policy makers instructed the IDF to respond with restraint to Egyptian attacks, hoping thereby to encourage Egypt to de-escalate the fighting. As IDF losses mounted with no end to hostilities in sight, however, they decided to “escalate [the fighting] for the sake of de-escalation”¹⁸: first, by unleashing the IAF against Egyptian positions along the canal and, later, by initiating a “deep-penetration” bombing campaign against targets inside Egypt.

Neither effort bore the desired fruit, and the second elicited direct Soviet intervention in the fighting (climaxing in an Israeli–Soviet air clash in which the IAF shot down five Soviet aircraft

without loss to itself). The War of Attrition did not end until the summer of 1970, when the Meir government came under strong American diplomatic pressure to stop the fighting. While Israel remained in firm control of the Sinai, Soviet–Egyptian forces had wrested air superiority in the canal zone away from the IAF. This development would facilitate the Egyptian offensive at the outset of the 1973 Yom Kippur War three years later.

The IDF contended that the War of Attrition had been an aberration. Though it upgraded its defensive capabilities, particularly by building a string of strongpoints close to the Suez Canal that came to be known as the Bar-Lev Line,¹⁹ the general staff continued to place its faith in offensive mobile warfare centered around airpower and armor. Furthermore, defense policy makers held fast to “the concept,” which combined a belief that Egypt would not initiate a war against Israel so long as the Egyptian air force lacked the capability to knock out IAF bases with a conviction that Syria would not go to war with Israel by itself. Even in the highly unlikely event that one of these assumptions proved to be erroneous, continued the concept, Israeli intelligence would provide 48–72 hours of early warning, time enough for the IDF to mobilize its assets either to block or to preempt an Arab offensive.²⁰

The concept collapsed like a house of cards in the early fall of 1973. Egypt and Syria devised a clever war plan to neutralize Israeli air and armored superiority. Worse still, Israeli intelligence misinterpreted signals that war was imminent. Consequently, the IDF received only a few hours of early warning instead of the promised 2–3 days. Even the time available was partially squandered as a result of differences between the general staff and the Meir government regarding the scope of reserve mobilization and whether to carry out a preemptive air strike.

Under American diplomatic pressure to refrain from initiating hostilities, the government refused to authorize either a full reserve mobilization or, more importantly, a preemptive air attack. Hence, the IDF suffered very serious reverses on both the northern and southern fronts at the outset of the Yom Kippur War.

Ultimately, both offensives were contained thanks to the tenacity of the IDF’s soldiers, the skillfulness of its junior officers and the speedy deployment of its reserve forces (which reached the fronts, particularly the Golan front, much more quickly than had been anticipated prior to the war). After stabilizing the fronts, the IDF launched successful counter-offensives in the north and south that brought its forces to within artillery range of Damascus and to within 62 miles (100 km) of Cairo, respectively. In the process, the IDF ousted the Syrian army from the Golan and destroyed much of the Egyptian army’s strength in massive battles.²¹

Once the guns fell silent, it became evident that the IDF had won an impressive victory, especially considering its grave situation at the commencement of the war, when it was greatly outnumbered on both fronts. Still, the price was high. Israel lost over 2,500 men, 800 tanks and 100 aircraft.²²

Focused on how the war had begun rather than on how it had ended, the Israeli public was shaken by the Yom Kippur War,²³ which also unnerved defense policy makers. Israelis were overcome by a deep sense of insecurity, the malaise made worse by the return of grisly Palestinian terror attacks.²⁴ In retrospect, however, Israel had reached a security turning point. The war convinced both Israel and Egypt of the need for peace negotiations, and thus catalyzed a process that, after considerable soul-searching, resulted in their 1979 peace treaty. The removal of Egypt from the anti-Israel camp fundamentally improved Israel’s security situation by making the prospect of interstate war more remote. Indeed, since the Yom Kippur War, the country has only once been involved in an interstate war – and, moreover, it initiated that war.

Still, as one basic security challenge waned another rose in the form of WMD. During the

mid-1970s, Iraq embarked on a nuclear weapons program. A mixture of Israeli sabotage and diplomacy slowed that enterprise but could not halt it. In the spring of 1981, therefore, Prime Minister Menachem Begin's government authorized the IAF to carry out a surgical strike against the Osirak nuclear reactor.²⁵ Widely criticized at the time both at home and abroad, the IAF raid, in hindsight, enhanced Israel's security. It demolished the reactor, setting back the Iraqi nuclear weapons program long enough for it to be totally dismantled by the Allied Coalition in the aftermath of the 1991 Gulf War.

Soon after the threat posed by the Iraqi nuclear weapons program had been eliminated, Israel's attention focused on the threat posed by the PLO's presence in Lebanon. After a prolonged period of cross-border fighting, Israel decided to remove this threat by launching an invasion of its northern neighbor, the 1982 Lebanon War.

The war went well at first. IDF ground forces quickly routed the PLO in southern Lebanon. Concomitantly, the IAF smashed the Syrian air force and obliterated Syria's air defenses in the Bekaa, where IDF ground forces also defeated their Syrian counterparts. Within a week, the IDF had trapped the remnants of the PLO's forces, as well as some Syrian troops, inside Beirut. At this point, however, what had begun as a limited operation to oust the PLO from southern Lebanon morphed into a broader campaign to remake Lebanon into a Christian-dominated, pro-Israel state. This more ambitious agenda served as a backdrop for a bloody months-long siege of the city, as well as a large-scale massacre of Palestinians by Israeli-backed Christian forces. These events turned the formerly supportive Israeli public against the war.²⁶

In a narrow military sense, the Lebanon War constituted another Israeli triumph. The surviving PLO forces were expelled from Lebanon, and the Syrian army suffered a bad beating. However, the victory soured quickly. The plan to turn Lebanon into a Christian-dominated, pro-Israel polity never came to fruition. Even worse, the IDF became bogged down in southern Lebanon in a long-term counterinsurgency campaign against *Hizbullah*, a rising Iranian-backed Shi'ite Islamist insurgent/terrorist organization. The Lebanon War, in short, did not resolve Israel's long-term security predicament along its northern frontier, even if it did result in a short-term halt to attacks on the country's territory from that quarter.

Security challenges through the end of the twentieth century

The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed an acceleration of trends that were already apparent in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War. A string of international and regional developments complemented each other to make even more remote the likelihood of Arab-Israeli interstate war. These developments included the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union, which led to a precipitous decline in foreign diplomatic and military support for Iraq and Syria; Iraq's Pyrrhic victory in the 1980–1988 Iran–Iraq War and its crushing defeat in the Gulf War; and the 1993 Israel–PLO Oslo Accords and the 1994 Israel–Jordan peace treaty.

On the other hand, despite the blow dealt to Iraq's nuclear weapons program, Israel still faced a growing WMD challenge. Throughout the 1980s, Iraq and Syria amassed large quantities of chemical weapons and ballistic missiles. Before the Gulf War, defense policy makers were so concerned that Iraq might attack the country with ballistic missiles fitted with chemical warheads that gas masks were distributed to the public.²⁷ During the war, Iraq fired about 40 (conventionally armed) missiles at Israel, causing panic among Israelis but inflicting negligible damage. While the Allied Coalition finally gutted Iraq's WMD programs after the Gulf War,

from the early 1990s onward, Iran's nuclear weapons/ballistic missile programs presented Israel with an even more serious WMD challenge, especially in light of the Islamic Republic's open and repeated pledges to destroy the country.²⁸

Of more immediate concern to defense policy makers throughout much of the 1980s and 1990s were the security challenges faced by the country in Lebanon and the administered territories. The IDF found itself unable to subdue *Hizbullah*, despite mounting two large-scale operations, Accountability (1993) and Grapes of Wrath (1996), as well as countless small-scale raids.²⁹ Indeed, the organization grew stronger over time. Additionally, foreshadowing developments in the twenty-first century, *Hizbullah* eventually began to fire rockets into northern Israel, not only harming the security of Israelis there but also blurring further the distinction between the military front line and the civilian home front. In the spring of 2000, seeking to put an end to IDF losses in Lebanon, Prime Minister Ehud Barak's government ordered a unilateral withdrawal from that country.

Meanwhile, the IDF had also to contend with a second LIC. Palestinian civil unrest erupted throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip in late 1987.³⁰ Initially surprised by the breadth and ferocity of the uprising (in Arabic: *Intifada*), the IDF scrambled to counter it by resorting to harsh tactics associated with riot control. After three years of violence, the IDF had learned which counterinsurgency measures worked and which did not – and, by the early 1990s, had managed to reduce significantly the disturbances.

By then, however, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's government had concluded that counterinsurgency methods alone would be insufficient to suppress the uprising completely. Instead, it concluded the Oslo Accords with the PLO, intending thereby to achieve security for the Israeli home front by reaching a comprehensive peace agreement. The accords, however, did not lead to peace with the Palestinians; the peace process derailed, partly by Rabin's assassination, but mainly by a new terror campaign begun by *Hamas*, a Sunni Islamist insurgent/terrorist organization formed at the outset of the *Intifada*.³¹

During the 1990s, defense policy makers began to adjust Israeli strategic culture to meet the country's evolving basic and chronic security challenges. The IDF's emphasis on offensive mobile warfare, which made sense in an era when interstate war constituted the main security challenge, made less sense in an era in which WMD/ballistic missiles constituted the primary threat. To counter WMD/missiles, Israel required long-range precision firepower, especially from the air, as well as missile defenses and reconnaissance satellites.

Consequently, defense policy makers not only continued to reinforce the IAF's capabilities but also accelerated the development of the Arrow anti-ballistic missile interceptor and Ofek reconnaissance satellite systems.³² Simultaneously, though the IDF retained robust heavy ground forces capable of waging offensive mobile warfare against national armies, it clearly began to shift its military doctrine in the direction of favoring attrition over maneuver. To counter the security challenge posed by insurgent/terror organizations, the IDF buttressed its light ground forces of elite infantry, special operations, intelligence and engineering units.³³

Security challenges in the twenty-first century

From a security perspective, the twenty-first century got off to an inauspicious start. The Palestinian Authority (PA) scuttled the peace summit held at Camp David in the year 2000 and immediately thereafter instigated a second *Intifada*.³⁴ This uprising differed fundamentally in

character from the first, dominated as it was from the outset by *Fatah*, *Hamas*, *Islamic Jihad* and other organizations intent on waging both an insurgency and a terror campaign against Israel. Unrest among the general Palestinian public was little in evidence.

Not since the War of Independence had Israeli citizens endured as much death, suffering and insecurity as they did between 2000 and 2005. A seemingly endless string of homicide bombings, shooting sprees and other types of terror attack claimed the lives of over 1,000 Israelis, mostly civilians.³⁵ The IDF first attempted to protect the Israeli home front by utilizing a mix of defensive measures (e.g., patrols and checkpoints) and limited offensive measures (e.g., minor air and ground raids into PA-controlled territory and targeted killings of senior insurgent/terrorist leaders). This formula, however, did not put a stop to terror attacks.

Early in 2002, therefore, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's government authorized the IDF to conduct Operation Defensive Shield, a major offensive sweep in the West Bank that rooted out the insurgent/terrorist organizations there. Furthermore, the IDF followed up on the success of the operation by maintaining offensive pressure on the remnants of these organizations via raids into PA-controlled territory. A defensive security barrier was also constructed along the most penetrable sections of the Israel–West Bank border. This blend of continuous military pressure and formidable physical obstacle resulted in a steady decline in terror attacks over the next few years, improving the Israeli public's security and putting an end to the second *Intifada*. Except for a wave of "lone wolf" terror attacks that began in late 2015, the West Bank has remained largely quiescent since 2005.

The situation on Israel's northern border, in contrast, heated up as the second *Intifada* wound down. Contrary to Israeli expectations, the IDF withdrawal from southern Lebanon did not restore quiet to the Israel–Lebanon frontier. Rather than enforce its sovereignty over the area, the Lebanese government relinquished control of southern Lebanon to *Hizbullah*, which engaged in sporadic cross-border raids against Israel. For a few years, Israel responded to these provocations on a tit-for-tat basis. Nevertheless, an especially deadly incident in the summer of 2006, resulting in the deaths of a number of IDF soldiers, coupled with renewed rocket fire into northern Israel, drove Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's inexperienced government to embark on the Second Lebanon War.³⁶

Defense policy makers, especially within the IDF general staff, believed that a massive air offensive offered the best prospect of containing the threat to the Israeli home front posed by *Hizbullah*'s sizable rocket arsenal. Consistent with the IDF's embrace of firepower-based attrition warfare, the employment of ground forces would be limited to shallow raids into southern Lebanon to destroy *Hizbullah*'s military infrastructure there. While the air offensive succeeded in neutralizing the threat posed by *Hizbullah*'s long- and medium-range rockets, the IAF could not stop the barrage of short-range rockets into northern Israel. This rocket fire compelled the local population to flee southward or move to underground bunkers.³⁷ The IDF's last-minute effort to halt the rocket attacks by means of a large-scale ground offensive turned out to be an embarrassing failure. The slow moving and, occasionally, bumbling offensive revealed the IDF's ability to wage mobile warfare had deteriorated significantly since the (first) Lebanon War.

In hindsight, the Second Lebanon War has bestowed on Israel one important security benefit: a longstanding truce along its border with Lebanon. This frontier has been quieter since the summer of 2006 than at any time since the Six-Day War, notwithstanding intermittent Israeli attacks on *Hizbullah* targets in Syria and Lebanon. It is not clear, though, how long this situation will endure. *Hizbullah* has grown far stronger over the past decade, a period during which Iran

and Russia have also exploited the Syrian civil war to establish a substantial military presence close to the Golan border.

Israel's other two asymmetrical wars of the early twenty-first century were fought in the Gaza Strip against *Hamas* (and allied organizations). Israel launched the first war, named Operation Cast Lead, in late 2008, not long after *Hamas* had taken control of the strip. The Sharon government had unilaterally withdrawn all IDF forces and Israeli settlers from the area in late 2005, calculating that this action would reduce Israeli–Palestinian friction. However, that prediction had not anticipated that *Hamas* would take over the Gaza Strip. Once *Hamas* seized control of the area, rocket fire into southern Israel, which had been negligible when the IDF had a presence there, now became a serious problem. The rockets themselves were not very destructive, but their steadily expanding number and range diminished the security of the local population.

Again, consistent with an emphasis on firepower-based attrition warfare, Operation Cast Lead opened with a one-week air offensive against the *Hamas*-led coalition, followed by a two-week ground offensive (the need for which was one of the major lessons the IDF drew from its experience in the Second Lebanon War).³⁸ Operation Cast Lead succeeded in the sense that it inflicted heavy casualties and massive infrastructural damage on the adversary. Moreover, rocket fire steadily slackened throughout the operation, causing negligible harm to the Israeli home front and restoring a measure of Israeli deterrence.³⁹

The lull in hostilities following the operation proved temporary. By the summer of 2014, Israel's security situation in the south had deteriorated to the point where Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's government authorized the IDF to mount Operation Protective Edge.⁴⁰ Contrary to the government's original intention, the operation soon evolved into an extended air–ground campaign. Not so much because of the threat posed by the *Hamas*-led coalition's rocket arsenal, which the Iron Dome anti-rocket interceptor system largely neutralized,⁴¹ but rather because of the threat posed by the coalition's attack tunnel network inside southern Israel.

Once more, the IDF inflicted heavy casualties and extensive infrastructural damage on the *Hamas*-led coalition, whose attack tunnel network was mostly destroyed. Israeli casualties were heavier than they had been during Operation Cast Lead, however. The calm that has ensued along the border with the Gaza Strip has been impressive, though not entirely uninterrupted.

Meanwhile, the prospect of nuclear weapons in the hands of Syria and Iran had come increasingly to occupy the minds of defense policy makers. The Syrian nuclear weapons program, which received assistance from North Korea, proved to be the less problematic of the two, partly because it was confined to just one facility, which the IAF destroyed in a single raid during the summer of 2007.⁴²

The Iranian program, much more advanced and diversified, has presented defense policy makers with a considerably more difficult challenge. Over the past two decades, Israel has waged sabotage and diplomatic campaigns to derail the Iranian nuclear weapons/ballistic missile programs.⁴³ Some actions have been successful, notably a joint Israeli–American cyberattack on the Natanz nuclear facility, during which a computer virus called Stuxnet destroyed many centrifuge machines over an extended period of time.⁴⁴ Still, interruptions have turned out to be only temporary, and future prospects are not encouraging. While the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreed to by Iran, on the one hand, and the permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany and the European Union (EU), on the other, has frozen the former's nuclear weapons program for now, the country will eventually be free to resume its program. Additionally, Iran's missile program has continued to make steady progress.

Past and future security challenges

Over the span of its history, Israel has transformed itself from a weak agricultural state into a robust industrial one. It has become the strongest power in the Middle East, as well as a medium power by world standards. In some respects – scientific prowess, technological advancement and military might – it ranks among the global leaders. Furthermore, the Israeli public is one of the healthiest and happiest in the world.⁴⁵ These facts serve as a testament to the general effectiveness of Israeli defense policies over the decades, security blunders and setbacks notwithstanding. Israel, after all, could not possibly have evolved into a success story without providing its citizenry with a high level of security.

Nonetheless, Israel has by no means been relieved of its onerous security burden. With respect to present and future security challenges, interstate war with the Arab world, today a low-probability event, could once more become a serious threat to the country if, for instance, radical Islamists were to seize power in any of the neighboring countries. Likewise, the use of WMD against Israel, also a low-probability event for the moment, could become a serious threat if, for instance, Iran renounced its adherence to the JCPOA. Still, Israel's most pressing security challenge for the foreseeable future is likely to be the intermediate-level threat of asymmetrical war with *Hizbullah* and/or a *Hamas*-led coalition.

To the chronic security challenges of insurgency and terrorism – which nowadays includes not only the threat posed by Palestinian and Lebanese organizations but also that posed by global jihadist networks – must be added the rapidly emerging challenges of cyber warfare and maritime warfare against energy assets. While Israel has so far been able to deflect all of the many cyberattacks launched against its critical infrastructure, this challenge is likely to become more serious, as is the burden of protecting the country's increasingly lucrative offshore gas fields.

How well the IDF will cope with the basic, intermediate and chronic security challenges of the future will depend to a great extent on the steadfastness of the Israeli public. In the past, Israeli society has proven to be quite resilient in the face of adversity. It remains to be seen whether the public will continue to tolerate the sacrifices that it has endured in the past to ensure the country's security in the years to come.

Notes

- 1 This group includes the prime minister, the defense minister, the foreign minister and other members of the security cabinet; members of the army general staff; the heads of the intelligence agencies; and senior officials in the defense and foreign ministries. Charles D. Freilich, *Zion's Dilemmas: How Israel Makes National Security Policy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012, and see Chapter 12.
- 2 Israelis use the label "current" to describe the second set of challenges; however, "chronic" better captures their persistent, low-level nature.
- 3 For compelling but sometimes conflicting histories of the War of Independence, see Efraim Karsh, *Palestine Betrayed*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010 and Benny Morris, *1948: A History of the First Arab–Israeli War*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008. On the human, economic and social costs of the war for Israel, see Moshe Naor, *Social Mobilization in the Arab–Israeli War of 1948: On the Israeli Home Front*. London: Routledge, 2013.
- 4 Yossi Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle Eastern Allies*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015 and Clive Jones and Tore T. Petersen (eds.), *Israel's Clandestine Diplomacies*. London: Hurst & Company, 2013, chapters 4, 5 and 8.
- 5 See Chapter 3.
- 6 Daniel Byman, *A High Price: The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp. 18–26 and Jonathan Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare From 1953 to 1970*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988, pp. 34–122.
- 7 Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Israeli Defense Forces and Low-Intensity Operations," in: David Charters and Maurice Tugwell

- (eds.) *Armies in Low-Intensity Conflict: A Comparative Analysis*. London: Brassey's Defense Publishers, 1989, pp. 56 and 58 and Ernest Stock, *Israel on the Road to Sinai, 1949–1956*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 71.
- 8 Yagil Henkin, *The 1956 Suez War and the New World Order in the Middle East: Exodus in Reverse*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2015, p. 51.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, pp. 43–50.
 - 10 Alaric Searle, *Armoured Warfare: A Military, Political and Global History*. London: Bloomsbury, 2017, p. 156.
 - 11 Sylvia K. Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance: France and Israel From Suez to the Six Day War*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974. Franco–Israeli cooperation on nuclear weapons/ballistic missiles is exhaustively reviewed in Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998, pp. 41–242.
 - 12 Ami Gluska, “‘The War Over the Water’ During the 1960s,” in: Mordechai Bar-On (ed.) *A Never-Ending Conflict: A Guide to Israeli Military History*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004, pp. 109–131.
 - 13 Ami Gluska, *The Israeli Military and the Origins of the 1967 War: Government, Armed Forces, and Defense Policy, 1963–1967*. London: Routledge, 2007 and Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
 - 14 Searle, *Armoured Warfare*, p. 159.
 - 15 See Chapter 16.
 - 16 Byman, *A High Price*, pp. 34–54.
 - 17 Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969–1970: A Case Study of Limited Local War*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980 and David A. Korn, *Stalemate: The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967–1970*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992.
 - 18 In the words of Chief of Staff Chaim Bar-Lev, as cited in Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli–Egyptian War of Attrition*, p. 87.
 - 19 Simon Dunstan, *Israeli Fortifications of the October War 1973*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2008.
 - 20 Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep: The Surprise of Yom Kippur and Its Sources*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2005.
 - 21 Chaim Herzog, *The War of Atonement: October, 1973*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown and Co., 1975 and Abraham Rabinovich, *The Yom Kippur War: The Epic Encounter That Transformed the Middle East*. New York: Schocken Books, 2004.
 - 22 Searle, *Armoured Warfare*, p. 165.
 - 23 Charles S. Liebman, “The Myth of Defeat: The Memory of the Yom Kippur War in Israeli Society,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 29 (1993): 399–418.
 - 24 Byman, *A High Price*, p. 60.
 - 25 Amos Perlmutter, Michael I. Handel and Uri Bar-Joseph, *Two Minutes Over Baghdad*, 2nd expanded edition. London: Frank Cass, 2003.
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 - 27 Lawrence Freedman and Efraim Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict, 1990–1991: Diplomacy and War in the New World Order*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 307.
 - 28 Emanuele Ottolenghi, *Under a Mushroom Cloud: Europe, Iran, and the Bomb*. London: Profile Books, 2009.
 - 29 Byman, *A High Price*, pp. 209–239.
 - 30 Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari, *Intifada: The Palestinian Uprising, Israel’s Third Front*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990 and Sergio Catignani, *Israeli Counter-Insurgency and the Intifadas: Dilemmas of a Conventional Army*. London: Routledge, 2008, pp. 72–101.
 - 31 Byman, *A High Price*, pp. 93–112.
 - 32 David Rodman, “Arab Rockets, Iranian Missiles, and Israeli Air Defenses,” *Small Wars Journal* 9 (2013). www.smallwarsjournal.com.
 - 33 On the IDF’s transformation during recent decades, see Michael Raska, *Military Innovation in Small States: Creating a Reverse Asymmetry*. London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 59–94.
 - 34 Byman, *A High Price*, pp. 113–174 and Catignani, *Israeli Counter-Insurgency*, pp. 102–141.
 - 35 Catignani, *Israeli Counter-Insurgency*, p. 105.
 - 36 Byman, *A High Price*, pp. 251–265 and Amos Harel and Avi Isaacharoff, *34 Days: Israel, Hezbollah, and the War in Lebanon*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
 - 37 Uzi Rubin, *The Rocket Campaign Against Israel During the 2006 Lebanon War*. Ramat Gan: The Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2007.
 - 38 Byman, *A High Price*, pp. 190–205 and Amir Kulick, “‘Lebanon Lite’: Lessons From the Operation in Gaza and the Next Round Against Hizbollah,” *Military and Strategic Affairs* 1 (2009): 51–66.
 - 39 Uzi Rubin, *The Missile Threat From Gaza: From Nuisance to Strategic Threat*. Ramat Gan: The Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2011.
 - 40 The Database Desk, Incidents and Activists Database, *Operation ‘Protective Edge’: A Detailed Summary of Events*. Herzliya: International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 2014. www.ict.org.il.
 - 41 For the Hamas-led coalition’s rocket campaign, see Uzi Rubin, *Israel’s Air and Missile Defense During the 2014 Gaza War*. Ramat Gan: The Begin–Sadat Center for Strategic Studies, 2015.
 - 42 David Makovsky, “The Silent Strike: How Israel Bombed a Syrian Nuclear Installation and Kept It a Secret,” *The New Yorker*, September 17, 2012. www.newyorker.com. The United States had previously turned down an Israeli suggestion that American planes perform the task.

- 43 Ronen Bergman, *The Secret War With Iran: The 30-Year Clandestine Struggle Against the World's Most Dangerous Terrorist Power*. New York: Free Press, 2008 and Yaakov Katz and Yoaz Hendel, *Israel vs. Iran: The Shadow War*. Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2012.
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- 45 Swiss-Israeli Association, "Life Expectancy in Israel on the Rise," *Israel Between the Lines*, June 1, 2017 and Zach Pontz, "And the Happiest Countries in the World Are ...," *From the Grapevine*, March 16, 2016. These Internet articles are available at www.israelbetweenthelines.com and www.fromthegrapevine.com, respectively.

3

The evolution and development of the IDF

Yaakov Amidror

Introduction

Self-reliance has always been at the core of Israel's security doctrine. Following upon the horrors of the Holocaust, Israel's founding fathers instinctively grasped the imperative for preserving independence of decision and action. Thus, echoing sentiments they first expressed 70 years ago, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu said on May 23, 2017, "We remember the hatred towards Jews that consumed a defenseless people. We pledge never to be defenseless against that hatred again. And to fulfill that pledge, Israel must always be able to defend itself by itself against any threat."

Despite the financial and social costs – Israel still spends around 5% of its GNP on defense – this premise remains the cornerstone of Israel's national security philosophy and of IDF (Israel Defense Forces) operational planning. Absent self-sufficiency in major categories of defense capability, Israel has had no alternative but to accept military aid from other countries, mainly funding and advanced weapon systems. Even so, the original foundational principle still holds: the Jewish state must be ready to pursue its own national security without the involvement of outside parties on the battlefield.

This chapter reviews patterns of continuity and change throughout the IDF's development over the course of seven decades. Its central thesis is that adjustments by the IDF in terms of (1) military ethos, (2) organizational structure (3) command and control reflect a dominant *evolutionary* rather than *revolutionary* pattern. Thus, most of the initial principles guiding the IDF at the time of its formation remain valid today – albeit with essential amendments dictated primarily by the unstable Middle East strategic environment. Today, Israel is immeasurably stronger than in the past; for the time being conventional threats to the country's existence have diminished, while the ranking of its enemies and the nature of threats to its national security are qualitatively different.

The point to keep in mind is that the military establishment and the modern IDF still adhere to many of the guidelines and standard operating procedures formulated as early as the 1950s, soon after the end of War of Independence, and credited with relative success ever since.

Three factors certify the IDF's uniqueness as a military organization:

- It confronts a relentlessly hostile environment;
- Between rounds of conflict it is called upon to carry out operations of unprecedented

- complexity;
- It must be prepared at all times for a range of future contingencies covering both full-scale and limited wars.

Defining characteristics

Force composition

Worth noting at the start is that Israel continues to maintain a system of mandatory conscription at ages 18–21, meaning a majority of its men and women in uniform are both young conscripts and inexperienced. Secondly, since the IDF constantly engages in developing fresh recruits as well as career officers, fully a third of the complement will be engaged in various training programs at any given moment. Those displaying “good soldiering” then advance fairly rapidly through the ranks. It is only after several years of intensely active service as field commanders that they are given time out to receive theoretical military education and rudimentary exposure to military history.

The IDF is thus both a well-oiled war machine run on a permanent war footing, programmed for the renewal of conflict at a moment’s notice, and a never-ending prep school, socializing and transforming thousands of young men and women every year from civilians to soldiers. From both a socio-economic and military perspective, this latter effort represents a serious drain on resources and on energies otherwise better channeled to war preparedness.

The operational arena

Due to the country’s small size and to the fact that the several regional commands are closely interlinked, the IDF functions as a single armed force fighting in a single theater of action even while engaging several enemies simultaneously. Unhindered movement throughout the interior of the country thus becomes critical for the IDF’s wartime capabilities, making it possible to transfer units and supplies from one sector to another rapidly.

Another operational premise is that the outcome of any conflict is likely be decided on the ground. This in no way contradicts the very high importance IDF strategists attach to employing Israel’s powerful and modern air force to the greatest extent possible, contingent in each situation upon the targeted area, geographic terrain and enemy in question.

A further defining feature is the blurred if not altogether erased distinction between Israel’s military and civilian home fronts. In light of the massive and all-encompassing firepower now aimed at the country – in particular, the more than 120,000 missiles and rockets now deployed by organizations such as *Hizbullah* and *Hamas* – defending the home front acquires singular importance. For this purpose, the IDF increasingly relies on state-of-the-art military technologies.

Operational challenges

A primary challenge now facing the IDF ever since the establishment of *Hizbullah* 30 years ago is developing the ability (a) to fight terrorist organizations that are assuming the status of full-fledged armies and are acting from within populated areas, and (b) to destroy the growing arsenal

of missiles they possess. This dual challenge mandates the IDF continue to invest in unique defense systems, while also maintaining its offensive stance and the ability to carry out missions in difficult terrain, such as mountainous areas with thick vegetation, and urban areas with extensive underground tunnel networks. While accustomed to applying most of its force from within Israel to well-defined adjacent areas immediately beyond its borders, the IDF must also gear itself in coming years to act against high-quality targets at unprecedented, far greater distances.

In the foreseeable future the IDF's battles are expected to take place in densely populated regions, making it difficult in the extreme to distinguish between civilians and enemy combatants. Both *Hizbullah* and *Hamas* have purposefully worked to promote precisely such a situation in order to limit the IDF's freedom of operation and to drag it into conflict with the international community. World opinion, for its part, has remained silent even as these terrorist organizations persist in firing on Israel's civilian population from within the very midst of Lebanese or Palestinian residential centers. Clearly, this new predicament directly affects the IDF's *modus operandi*: its methods of combatting the enemy plus the need to secure domestic and international legitimacy for the army's actions. These become serious preliminary considerations at all levels of decision-making when assessing any given or hypothetical security situation.

The technological dimension

A top priority of late are cyber warfare and autonomous systems, with the IDF the first military to deploy UAVs for intelligence and attack purposes. Israel is presently capable of manufacturing tanks and heavy armor indigenously as well as its own active anti-missile defense systems. It is also in the process of producing much of its own artillery, whereas submarines are constructed and outfitted under contract in Germany, as are surface naval vessels. Israel's air force, on the other hand, bases its armory on American mainframe platforms, which Israel's military industries then proceed to upgrade with advanced electronics systems.

To optimize the use of precision-guided ordinance now in the IDF's possession requires a major shift in the focus of military intelligence toward first identifying and then actually targeting enemy operatives and assets. This combination of weapons technology offering high degrees of accuracy with the ability to zero in on targets highlights the IDF's ability to inflict precise and meaningful damage from great distances. Such a welcome and timely capability meets three requirements: target identification in real time; striking as many targets as possible simultaneously in support of ground forces while also neutralizing the missile threat to Israel; and minimizing Arab civilian casualties and collateral damage, thereby retaining international legitimacy.

To operate in such complicated environments and to coordinate such sophisticated weapon systems, the IDF has installed new command and control systems. Their main purpose is to weld the different elements into one very smart network, thereby ensuring that all information arrives at the correct place, at the correct time and at the necessary command posts. The system is designed to minimize the errors that the growing complexity of the new battleground might cause the combat forces to make.

Adaptability and innovativeness when confronting inevitable change, as seen here, is an IDF hallmark. Although several committees of inquiry since the 1973 Yom Kippur War have found the army unprepared and forced the retirement of senior officers, the IDF retains its public image

of effectiveness. It has proven its ability to overcome occasional operational mishaps and to correct mistakes, inspiring confidence that it remains equal to the challenges it faces.

What this essay chooses to emphasize, however, is the powerful hold of two permanent variables still playing a role in shaping the structure and character of the IDF: the immediate pre-state and post-statehood experience, and immutable geography.

Roots of the IDF

Worth recalling is how the IDF grew out of a grand merger, which integrated four separate paramilitary organizations. The *Haganah* and *Palmach*, which together had formed the semi-clandestine military wing of the Jewish Agency (the Jewish formal representative organization) during the British mandate period; and the *Irgun* and *Lehi*, two (much smaller) forces that had led the armed struggle against the British. There is considerable significance in these roots in terms of personnel, because all four groups attracted the most talented and highly motivated young men and women of the Jewish *Yishuv* (pre-state Jewish community). The caliber of its officers made the fledgling IDF a key institution in the newly founded state, while also enabling the armed forces to maintain high leadership and operational standards.

The IDF culture that emerged, valuing improvisational skill over learning from history and boldness over rules and regulations, has its deeper roots in the pre-state militias. Besides providing much of the organizational DNA, the informal character of the *Palmach*, and to a lesser extent the *Haganah*, enormously influenced the spirit of the IDF. Even today, the ground forces in particular preserve the somewhat disorderly tradition of placing less emphasis on strict discipline. It would seem that the absence at times of professionalism, together with a lack of respect for the historical and theoretical knowledge assigned great importance in many other armies, is the price paid for this distinctive military culture.

By way of contrast, the navy and even more so the air force adopted traditions from foreign militaries. The Israeli Air Force, for example, drew on the culture of Britain's RAF (Royal Air Force), whereas Israel's navy and particularly its marine commandos modeled themselves on their Italian counterparts while still honoring the *Palmach's* earlier naval traditions. To be sure, over the years the influence of these different traditions has become less pronounced, although still felt. Even now, the infantry units lean toward a somewhat less rigid, less regulated culture than the navy and air force.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, only once in Israel's history has a non-infantry or non-tank commander been appointed Chief of the IDF General Staff (CoS) – the exception being a former Air Force Commander. In fact, part of his troubles during an abbreviated tour of duty as CoS (2005–2007) traced to the difficulty in shifting from leading the air force, with its highly centralized command structure, to directing ground forces. In conversation with the author, a former Air Force Commander highlighted these contrasting cultures as follows: “execution of an order begins when the Commander of the Air Force issues it, whereas when the CoS makes a decision it merely provides the basis for negotiation.” His comment says worlds about the respective cultures of the air and ground arms of the IDF in terms of structure and chain of command, the first being highly centralized and disciplined, and the second leaning more toward decentralization.

To this day, the IDF ethos lacks sharp definition and reflects a certain degree of tension between its conscript and militia nature on the one hand and, on the other hand, the need to tighten regulations and procedures in a very highly technological army. As a rule, we can assume

the greater the applied use of advanced technology and the need for technical precision, the greater the insistence upon order and discipline. Tighter command and control is required in order to minimize errors and accidents. Hence, an emphasis on strict discipline is most noticeable in the air force, the navy and the armored corps – all three entirely dependent on the sophisticated systems and craft they operate – as well as the artillery corps, graded on its ability to shell a specific location at a particular time. By contrast, the infantry corps, whose success has always depended more on the quality of its soldiering and the tactical initiative of its field commanders, allows for improvisation and individuality, even at the price of compromising on discipline, regulations and “soldiering by the book.” The fact that since 1974 all but one of the incumbents of the office of Chief of Staff, who by law is the IDF’s commander, had previously been infantry officers, with some additional experience as tank commanders, significantly influences the Force’s culture.

The geographic factor

The second element shaping the IDF’s development lies in the connection between the geographical landscape within which it operates and those threat agents arising over the years from within that geographical space. In a word, Israel is a state devoid of strategic depth, the blurring between Israel’s civilian and military home fronts having existed already in 1948. This constant need to defend the country’s hinterland and citizens remains a vital part of the IDF security doctrine, as mirrored both by its sizeable investment in force development and in planning for rapid, unimpeded force deployment during any future crisis.

As evident from even a cursory glance at the physical map, Israel is a long and narrow country. Its length on a north–south axis running from Metulla to Eilat is approximately 450 kilometers or 279 miles. While this might seem comparatively large, since the expanse from Beersheba to Eilat is entirely desert, the “relevant length” of the country is less than half. Israel’s economic, financial, technological and demographic center is heavily concentrated along the Mediterranean seacoast on a narrow strip of just 100 km (62 miles) between Haifa and Ashdod. Moreover, the core of this strategic yet vulnerable “heartland,” the State of Israel’s center of gravity, is the still more constricted area immediately surrounding Tel Aviv – the 40 km (24 miles) separating Rishon LeZion from Herzliya.

From a security standpoint, the determining factor is not so much the country’s topographical length but its width. The distance from the Mediterranean Sea eastward to the mountainous area overlooking and dominating the coast – known as the “West Bank” and overwhelmingly populated by Palestinian Arabs – is merely 12 km (7.4 miles) at its narrowest (from Netanya to Tulkarm); and from Tel Aviv a mere 25 km (16 miles) at its widest. Even when adding the West Bank to the equation, the country’s total width is less than 60 km, or all of 37 miles.

From its very inception the State of Israel (and before it, the pre-state Jewish *Yishuv*) had to confront an existential security threat – a narrow territorial entity with its back to the Mediterranean Sea, surrounded on all sides by Arab foes sworn to its extinction. During the initial stage of the War of Independence, every dispersed Jewish location had to be defended against hostile local Palestinian and non-Palestinian irregular forces, leaving no choice but to dispatch small (mainly *Haganah* and *Palmach*) units to isolated Jewish towns and villages. The security dilemma was compounded when, on the same night that Israel declared independence (May 15, 1948), it was invaded by the regular armies of all the surrounding Arab countries. This new threat compelled an immediate and drastic restructuring. The nascent IDF organized itself

into relatively large brigades, making it possible to concentrate military forces previously scattered around isolated locations.

Having suffered a terrible toll in the 1948 fighting – 6,000 casualties, constituting 1% of the total Jewish population of 600,000 – the IDF had to then face the likelihood of further hostilities across vulnerable armistice lines against an Arab bloc committed to Israel’s destruction. The precedent thus established remains valid. As soon as one war is over, the IDF must prepare for the next confrontation. Victories in wars – however numerous – will not force Israel’s neighbors to sue for peace. Victory in one encounter may serve as a deterrent and delay the next one but will not prevent it.

Founding principles

Notwithstanding the many changes in the ongoing, protracted Arab–Israeli conflict, except for four modifications the “ten commandments” originally laid down by Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and the IDF’s founding fathers remain largely intact and no less convincing today.

- 1 Israel remains divided into three regional commands, each divided into geographic brigades responsible for defending and securing its assigned sector. Northern Command, responsible for Syria and Lebanon; Central Command, on the long eastern front with Jordan; and Southern Command, facing Egypt and the Gaza Strip. Recently, observation and light infantry troops are on permanent assignment to some of the different sectors along Israel’s borders and in the West Bank.
- 2 Organized into mobile divisional formations, both regular troops and reservists can be transferred from one Command to another fairly rapidly, and to different fronts based on changing operational needs. These “spearhead forces,” are made up of strong infantry brigades, mechanized infantry, and armored brigades (today all tank brigades deploy the Israeli-made *Merkava*).
- 3 The General Staff located in Tel Aviv exercises overall control of all ground forces through the three regional commands. Only in rare cases, mainly those involving sensitive special operations far beyond enemy lines, will the General Staff assume direct command. That is also the case when ground operations involve soldiers reaching their destination other than via the land border with the country in question.
- 4 Even though the CoS is the ultimate commander of all ground forces, in wartime commanders of the regional Commands retain a remarkably high degree of autonomy that includes control of air and naval forces when and where needed.
- 5 The Israeli Air Force has a distinctive history and tradition, and its development was heavily influenced by the RAF experience during the Battle of Britain. Like Britain in 1940, Israel is like an island, surrounded by enemies, and attaches supreme importance to defending its airspace, which is therefore the Air Force’s primary mission. This, in turn, dictates a centralized command and control system leaving little latitude for the individual pilot. The Air Force Commander is responsible for building the forces, from training to maintaining as well as for the Air Force operations, subject to the CoS. For that purpose, he oversees an enormous headquarters staff that filters information, maintains direct communication with pilots and crews and monitors every aircraft in flight. Put differently, the role of base commanders and flight commanders focuses largely on development and training, and not on operational decision-making.

- 6 Like the IAF, all maritime operational decisions in the Israeli Navy as well as building the naval capabilities, are taken at naval headquarters, by the commander of the navy – under the command of the IDF General Staff.
- 7 Because ground forces are subject to mission control by each regional command while aerial forces remain under close supervision by IAF headquarters, there have been difficulties over the years in coordinating between ground and air forces. All aircraft are monitored exclusively by the air force – whether fighters, transport planes, helicopters or UAVs; and whether used for intelligence or attack purposes. The only exceptions are small UAVs assigned to brigades or battalions for intelligence gathering or for target-acquisition purposes, and therefore managed by the ground forces. Due to the two different systems of control, friction and conflicts of interest remain an unsolved problem in the IDF, although improved technology has contributed to closer consultation, communication and coordination during the last few years.
- 8 All security planning by the IDF presupposes that whatever the challenge it will always be asymmetric, due simply to demographics. The combined population of the Arab states amounts to hundreds of millions, while Israel remains several orders of magnitude smaller. As of 2017, Israel was home to slightly more than 6.5 million Jews compared to some 400 million residents of the member countries of the Arab League – more than a third of them in countries bordering Israel. To offset this numerical deficiency, compulsory military service was instituted for Jewish Israelis, both men and women (subsequently for Druze, too) – a practice that remains in force.
- 9 Israel instituted and maintains a “people’s army” in the true sense through a military reserve system patterned on the Swiss model. As of 2017, mandatory service at age 18 consists of two years and eight months for men (reduced from three years) and two years for women. Thereafter, all Israelis under the age of 45 (previously until the age of 55) who served in the IDF, unless otherwise exempt, are theoretically eligible for reserve duty of 30 days per year, with women released from this obligation upon the birth of their first child. As a result, reserve units, their ranks swelled by soldiers having completed their mandatory service, are an important component of the IDF’s ground forces where reservists outnumber conscripts (which is not the case in the navy and air force). Aside from providing a major component of the IDF’s spearhead forces, reserve duty is also an important social factor for Israelis who in all surveys rate the IDF higher than any other public institution in terms of public trust.
- 10 The IDF also seeks to overcome Israel’s quantitative disadvantage by improving the capabilities of its combat troops on the modern battlefield, and hence invests heavily in progressive technological innovation. In the early years, the air force, later followed by the navy, was the main beneficiary of unique systems researched and developed by Israel. Only after suffering heavy casualties during the Yom Kippur War (1973) did the ground forces become major consumers of military technology. Surely the most impressive and meaningful accomplishment of recent years has been IDF success in creating layers of precision air defense against missile and rocket threats facing Israel. The indigenous “Iron Dome” project, together with “Arrow” and “David’s Sling,” jointly sponsored with the United States, have transformed Israel’s active air defense system into one of its largest, important and very expensive security components. Preserving the country’s qualitative edge is not just a slogan; it is an imperative, which guides IDF future investment priorities.

Like any organic body, the IDF must also meet the test of receptivity to change, and be judged

by its flexibility.

Four evolutionary trends

Moving from the above ten constants, there are at least four transitions underway with major consequence for the structure, role and actual performance of the IDF. Prompted by developments in the Middle East and a better grasp of the longer-term realities facing the country, and testifying to the evolutionary rather than revolutionary pattern of military change, these four functional adaptations involve administration, civil defense, airpower and targeting intelligence. Each warrants closer analysis.

The burdens of governance

Following the 1967 Six-Day War, administration over the West Bank and Gaza Strip was assigned to the IDF's Central and Southern Commands, respectively. Southern Command retained military responsibility over the Gaza area even after Israel's complete withdrawal in 2005. The dividing of responsibility to the Palestinians between two regional commands based on geographical considerations can be problematic in itself, and made even more so since the General Security Service (GSS, Israel's equivalent of Britain's MI5), with responsibility for preventing terror attacks in all areas under Israeli control, has become a hugely important partner in both regions. Orchestrating activities quietly and efficiently among different agencies is always complicated. This said, however, cooperation in administering and securing the West Bank and Gaza between the GSS, a civilian body under the Prime Minister's direct control, and the IDF, has been surprisingly very successful.

Civil defense

During the 1991 Gulf War, a new and very real threat emerged in the form of 39 medium-range missiles launched against Israel from western Iraq. In response, the IDF (acting on a Ministry of Defense decision) set up what is now the Home Command, which assumes direct responsibility from the three respective regional commands for preparing domestic society against the eventuality of war. The moment the alarm sounds of an incoming projectile, and the civilian population is instructed to take cover, the Home Command must deal with the consequences of missile strikes on Israel's interior. Reporting to the CoS but also with a direct line to the Ministry of Defense, the Home Command operates in full cooperation with civilian bodies such as the local municipalities and authorities, *Magen David Adom* (Israel's Red Cross), the police and fire departments.

Aerial and naval power

Despite all the diplomatic and military changes the region has witnessed, the IDF's structural framework has remained fixed – grounded, literally, on the three (now four) spatial directions, as discussed earlier, of the northern, southern, eastern and home fronts. Its corollary – the supreme importance of the ground forces, and the supporting role of the air force secondary to that of the ground forces – has long been taken for granted and gone unchallenged, the consensus being that

Israel's wars will be decided on the ground.

Nonetheless, even here a “quiet revolution” may be unfolding in stages. As applied specifically to Israel, with its enhanced aerial and intelligence capabilities, future risk-adverse governments may perhaps decide against deploying their ground forces in hopes of avoiding entrapment in open-ended land fighting, diplomatic crises and heavy casualties. Instead, they might opt for surgical air strikes. But even in such scenarios – where operations are entirely airborne – an air force commander remains subordinate to the CoS.

Something comparable is evolving gradually with respect to the Israeli Navy's status. Traditionally, the naval theater has not been regarded as critical for Israel's vital security so long as Mediterranean Sea shipping lanes remain open to merchant civilian cargo vessels. Consequently, the navy has always been a relatively small and less significant arm of the IDF, even while maintaining a high level of technological and operational capacity over the years. Recently, however, with the acquisition of submarines and the presence offshore of installations exploiting Israel's natural gas fields, now a very valuable economic asset, the navy is assuming a more pivotal role in Israel's strategic defense.

Intelligence gathering and targeting

Never let it be said the IDF has in any way downplayed the contribution of military intelligence to national security. The agencies involved in intelligence – *Aman* (the IDF's Military Intelligence Directorate), the *Mossad* and the *Shin Bet* or *Shabak* (the General Security Service) – have always been respected as additional prized instruments for gaining advantage over opponents enjoying numerical superiority.

Even so, the conversion from fighting standing armies to confrontations with sub-state or “hybrid” organizations, parallel with the emphasis on precision munitions, have together increased the influence and the importance of intelligence processing and the status particularly of the army's intelligence corps. Today they are regarded as a vital part of IDF decision-making at all levels of command.

What makes accuracy doubly important is the necessity for distinguishing between terrorists and innocent civilians, as borne out by the IDF's experience in Gaza and Lebanon. In both cases, *Hamas*, Islamic *Jihad* and *Hizbullah* did their utmost to fudge this distinction by wearing civilian clothing and purposely deploying their fighters and weaponry in civilian areas, among civilians and firing from within civilian facilities such as schools, hospitals and mosques. Only precise intelligence can facilitate precision strikes against terrorists and minimize the number of civilians killed or harmed, thereby reducing the scope of ethical and diplomatic complications likely to be encountered.

In the wake of the IDF's experience in cross-border operations both in southern Lebanon and the Gaza Strip, Israeli security planners are fully aware by now that in the struggle against Arab terrorism there is no real substitute for accurate intelligence. In conventional warfare, superior firepower and massive ground forces might be able to compensate for the lack of intelligence, even if the cost of operational success becomes a heavier price in casualties and time. However, when waging war against irregular forces or urban terrorists, both on the ground and in the air – as Israel increasingly finds itself doing – without quality intelligence, the enemy remains unidentified, elusive and still at-large.

In conceptual terms, the IDF stands in the forefront of those countries putting a premium on intelligence work, and with two purposes in mind. The first mandates in-depth and ongoing study

of Israel's adversaries, their strengths and weaknesses, their deployment plans and intentions. This effort is required to achieve positive results on the battlefield, which will result from attaining maximum intelligence prior to maneuvering. The second aim of intelligence work is to increase prospects for destroying an enemy force or specific targets through the most suitable and effective type of firepower. Adding urgency to the integration and processing of intelligence data is the time factor. One of the principal lessons derived from the fighting in and over Gaza, including most recently in 2014, is the need to deflect international criticism and diplomatic sanctions by completing any assigned mission as surgically and as expeditiously as possible. Operations that do not meet that requirement lack all utility.

Putting performance before theory

After sketching these four evolutionary trends, and before turning to prospects for further reforms, at least one distinctive feature about the IDF mentioned earlier only in passing deserves singling out for further elaboration. It is quite impossible to understand how the IDF functions as an arm of Israeli national security without fully appreciating the path by which potential field commanders and low-ranking officers are groomed for senior posts and then promoted up through the ranks. The salient fact is that Israel and the IDF possess no professional military academy to serve as the first step in promoting officers.

Unlike modern militaries elsewhere, all IDF ground commanders advance through the ranks only by first excelling at soldiering and as junior officers in the field. There are no tests at the time of basic training, or along the way, which stress an officer candidate's academic potential. On the other hand, any draftee unable to complete an obstacle course, for example, or failing a map reading exercise, will advance no further. The situation is slightly different for air force pilots and naval commanders, who are carefully chosen before and during an extended basic training course that assesses a cadet's character and abilities. Even these courses provide no schooling on military history or theory to the extent common in professional militaries worldwide.

This selection method, with its emphasis on "basic soldiering," has proven an excellent means of building combat cadres, where leadership requires physical fitness and strong tactical command as well as courage and the ability to lead by example on the battlefield. On the other hand, it does not filter out those candidates who might be best suited later on for commanding a division or one of the regional commands. At these senior ranks, personal bravery and leading men under fire may be important, but no more so than the talent for clearly presenting plans to senior officers, or the intellectual ability to analyze complex issues and to apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations.

The end result is that officers in the IDF tend to reach senior ranks at a relatively young age with invaluable practical hands-on experience in commanding units at all levels, but without the conceptual frameworks and historical background taught at military institutes and academies around the world. Although some commanders do study for two years at the IDF Tactical Command College before becoming company commanders, and while all officers must attend the IDF Command and Staff College before attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel, this schooling is arguably too little, too late. Thus, in the 70 years of the IDF, beyond authoring personal memoirs, very few high-ranking generals have left behind written works of any enduring value on theoretical subjects regarding the military profession.

The counter-argument of course is that IDF commanders are problem-solvers rather than

ivory-tower theoreticians. As the principal defense organ of the state, the IDF engages less in abstract thinking and more in finding creative solutions for the tangible here-and-now security challenges facing Israel.

Added value for Israel comes from the country's best and brightest – their military service completed after having been given weighty responsibilities and independence at a young age, and provided with specialized training and technical skills – contributing to Israel's current reputation as a “start-up nation” and global leader in scientific and technological advances.

Signposts of further evolutionary change

To its credit, the IDF continues to assess what further revisions it might or should initiate in its own organizational makeup and character, mandated by changing conditions at home, in the Middle East arena or around the globe. Based upon past performance and barring an unforeseen cataclysmic event, we should not expect to see any fundamental or drastic reform. Rather, the emphases may be changing, almost imperceptibly, both on the ground and in the air.

On the ground

One detects a marked preference by IDF planners and strategists to rely more than in the past on (1) lighter infantry forces and (2) special forces. For the first time, the IDF has created light infantry units in substantial numbers that are limited to a peripheral role during wartime and will certainly not be involved in major combat zones. Instead, they fill the ever-present need for lighter forces to carry out routine security tasks such as guarding the country's otherwise permeable borders following the construction of a fence along most of them. Outfitted with top-of-the-line observation and tracking equipment, some of these mixed male–female battalions are deployed along Israel's lengthiest but quieter borders with Egypt and Jordan, two countries with which Israel has binding peace treaties. Others are assigned to full-time supervision of the West Bank's main roads and the perimeter fences surrounding it.

The multiple benefits of deploying these light infantry units are not hard to see. The rationale behind their formation is that by their fixed deployment they release regular ground forces from routine monitoring and policing tasks, freeing them instead for more intensive exercises and extensive combat training. Secondly, the nature of their deployment supplies these forces with enhanced opportunities to study in depth the unique characteristics of the area in which they have to operate and the enemy that they have to confront. Furthermore, since they comprise many female soldiers, these units offer women new career possibilities, an important role in contributing to the country's security and opportunities for promotion.

Another indicator of subtle change in the IDF is the structural changes of the special forces that hopefully will be more effective in the war against “hybrid” or irregular forces. Historically, special units or commando forces contributed very little overall in Israel's many and disparate military campaigns, as opposed to their missions between the wars, which contributed considerably to the IDF's achievements. More recently, however, these carefully selected special forces have been elevated in terms of their operational importance. For the first time Israel will field a Special Force Division and a Commando Brigade. The integration of these elite forces into the IDF's military culture and battle plans has proven neither simple nor necessarily smooth. It also remains unclear what impact reliance upon the “special ops” units will have on IDF

operational results.

In the air

The change in the IAF's title to the "Air and Space Arm" indicates changing emphases. Nevertheless, here too the pattern is not one of fundamental reforms but of incremental shifts. These are indicated by the introduction of air defense systems, a new generation of stealth fighter craft and unmanned aerial vehicles.

Dependence on active air defense systems such as "Iron Dome," "David's Sling" and "Arrow" 2 and 3 is altering the internal balance within the air arm, which traditionally favored the IAF's array of fighter craft. The task of "defending Israel's skies" is in effect passing from manned air force planes to a network of sophisticated and interoperable anti-missile systems blanketing the country that will be counted upon to play a critical role in securing Israel through enhanced early warning, passive defense and counter-strike capabilities.

Inauguration of the first of 50 F-35I "ADIR" long-range fighter planes procured from the US in 2016 is probably affecting the air force's operational philosophy as well as its centralized command and control system. Equipped with enhanced information-gathering and information-processing capabilities, once fully operational the F-35 squadrons will enable the IAF to expand its mission assignments while inputting its own intelligence data.

The first military to use unmanned aerial vehicles and in particular armed UAVs, the IDF is at the technological forefront of unmanned flight, and will presumably remain one of the leaders in this field. Looking to the future, the mass introduction of larger and more sophisticated drones bears the very real prospect of forcing a change in the ratio between manned and unmanned craft, with the latter assuming more and more tasks. For instance, because the Israeli Air Force does not operate dedicated bombers, bombing missions are carried out by F-15 and F-16 multi-purpose planes – soon to be augmented by the newer generation of F-35s – and by UAVs presently under design. The thrust in drone R&D is to attain the capabilities of piloted planes at a lower cost and without personal risk to pilots. Clearly, an unmanned air force will look very different.

The tendency to improve the IDF missile capabilities, based on the growing need for firepower in the next round of operations around Israel's borders, might reduce the dependency on the IAF for bombing targets within the range of few hundred kilometers. That step will considerably increase Israel's flexibility and at the same time free more of the Air Force's assets for other missions. It could consequently also alter the existing balance within the structure of the IAF.

Lastly, the IDF, like other militaries, is preoccupied with working out how best to integrate cyber capabilities, for both defensive and offensive purposes. Since it is clear that cyber warfare will become hugely important in coming years, and because there is a long road ahead, the IDF is already investing considerable sums of money and highly talented personnel in this area and is engaged in a deep and broad development of its cyber capabilities. How to organize the new units responsible for cyber, the relationship between offensive and defensive efforts and the ratio between them still remain huge challenges.

Conclusion

The combination of new geopolitical realities and endemic political instability in Middle Eastern regional affairs, together with the Israeli military establishment's deeply embedded organizational principles, imposes four basic missions on the IDF:

- 1 Providing an effective military response to the threat of heightened terrorism in addition to ongoing security problems within and along Israel's borders, across the West Bank and further afield;
- 2 Programming force improvement for a military where a third of its servicemen and women are demobilized, replaced or in special training courses each year, in addition to constantly upgrading its reserve forces;
- 3 Guaranteeing the armed forces' battle readiness against any form of encroachment or provocation on any one of Israel's four fronts, or on all of them simultaneously, with special emphasis to the ability to neutralize and destroy the missiles and rockets capable of reaching Israel's urban areas;
- 4 Ensuring the ability to carry out a number of pinpoint operations – preventive or retaliatory – against select longer-range targets in order to deter or punish distant enemies capable of harming Israel or Israeli nationals.

Confidence in the ability of the IDF, the General Staff and its top echelon of officers derives in large part from past performance under stress. The Israeli army has repeatedly demonstrated impressive improvisational capabilities that have served it, and the country, extremely well during unexpected crises, the best illustration being its recuperative powers in the worst hours and days of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Similarly, the IDF's strategic capabilities continue to be highly developed, relying primarily on a highly regarded, modern, operationally tested air force and on a naval arm equipped with submarines capable of operating far from the country's shores.

Yet a third source of encouragement is the human factor. Promotion through the ranks is based on merit, with outstanding soldiers in every cohort chosen to serve as operational commanders and encouraged to sign on as career officers, as are the more gifted men and women soldiers to fill positions in military intelligence. Excellence and professionalism extend to military R & D, where the Defense Ministry and IDF scout out talented high school candidates to devise cutting-edge technologies. This also applies to Israel's highly sophisticated military industries, which continue to supply the IDF with made-in-Israel solutions geared to Israel's particular security needs and battlefield conditions beyond those major weapons systems purchased abroad, mainly from the United States.

Realistically, it is the State of Israel's staying power alone that serves as the ultimate guarantee of its national sovereignty and national security. Until such time as the Arab and Islamic worlds reconcile themselves to the Jewish state's existence, in continuing to confront a hostile environment in the Middle East the country's leaders will always have to find ways of compensating for profound asymmetries in both population and resources. This obligation to preserve and wherever possible widen Israel's defensive and deterrent qualitative edge falls squarely on the shoulders of the Israel Defense Forces (and the Intelligence community).

Positioned at the center of these efforts, and because Israel is so small and narrow, the IDF cannot consider failure even at the tactical level, let alone think in terms of possible defeat or even a protracted stalemate in future wars. Should deterrence fail, neither Israelis nor the IDF will be given a second chance, or have an alternative safe haven. That the IDF be successful in securing Israel, by itself, is the essence of IDF doctrine.

Part II

Debating security

4

Neither Sparta nor Athens

Israeli public opinion on national security

Tamar Hermann

A quick Google (English) search tells a fascinating story: the combination “Israel” plus “security” attains 238,000,000 (!) results – considerably more than either “Israel” plus “Jewish” (142,000,000 hits), “Israel” plus “democracy” (83,000,000), or “Israel” plus “occupation” (75,500,000). True, the combination “Israel” plus “high tech” retrieves a larger number of hits (250,700,000) than does “Israel” plus “security,” but the overlap between the two searches is massive: many of the hits are, in fact, identical. In other words, as of today, almost no other concept is globally more closely associated with Israel than security. This reflects Israel’s geopolitical location – the turbulent Middle East; its ongoing involvement in a protracted conflict; and, apparently, the development of a top-quality security industry, which, thanks to the global security crisis, is now in high demand worldwide.

The prominence of the Israel–security association is not only external: hardly any other notion is used more often domestically in order to sustain and justify political agendas or, alternatively, to dismiss and refute them. Hawks and doves, feminists and machos, militarists and pacifists, Jews and Arabs, secular and religiously observant (Orthodox) – all participants in the Israeli public discourse relate one way or another to the security aspect as a main feature of national life. To a large extent, individual Israelis decide which party to vote for in elections on the basis of their security orientations and the security platforms of the various parties. Moreover, throughout the years the high saliency of security issues has shaped main features of the Israeli polity, including civil–military relations.¹

Consequently, some observers have gone so far as to characterize the Israeli reality as an army that owns a state rather than a state that possesses an army.² The central status of security is steadily reflected in Israel’s national resource allocation. Security expenses – direct and indirect, overt and covert – constitute the largest item in the state’s budget. In 2017–2018, direct expenses alone reportedly amounted to 70 billion New Israeli Shekels (circa \$20 billion).³ The strong bottom-up pressures to change this reality in the wake of the 2011 socio-economic protest wave have not (yet?) fostered a substantial priority change.

Security’s supremacy also has geographical/spatial implications. Extraordinarily large parts of the state’s lands are reserved exclusively for military use, often at the expense of critical public needs and interests.⁴ More important, individual lives in Israel are fundamentally shaped by the

security paramountcy: Israel is one of the few Western democracies to retain universal military conscription (for Israeli Jews), and the only democratic state to impose that obligation on females as well as males. Most Israeli young people spend two to three years, sometimes even longer, in military service, and some literally sacrifice their life for the nation's security while on active duty or related military activities. Over 23,500 Israeli soldiers were killed between 1948 and 2017, leaving behind many additional thousands of bereaved families, friends and colleagues. In fact, military service is widely regarded in Israel as a critical litmus test for good citizenship and has far-reaching implications, for example in the job market but also in politics; evident military expertise is still a highly promising entrance ticket for aspiring politicians. The inculcation of security into the national social fabric is so intensive that various security imprints are found in countless Israeli and non-Israeli fiction and nonfiction books, poems, films, visual art products, sculptures, dances, fashion items, popular songs and so on.

All these dimensions of security's impact, together with their social, cultural, economic and political consequences, have been thoroughly examined from all possible angles in numerous academic and nonacademic speeches, articles, books and policy papers by Israeli and foreign observers. To mention just a few here for no better reason than their more recent publication date, their author's academic seniority, or their impressive citation-index score would be unwise and unfair. It should be emphasized, though, that whatever their specific topic and whichever the methodology employed, all publications have acknowledged that security plays a major, if not the major, role in Israeli public discourse and political life. This reality has led certain experts, particularly in the social sciences, to characterize Israel as militaristic, a garrison state or a modern Sparta.⁵ However, others who have interpreted security's centrality as a logical outcome of Israel's objective situation have challenged that characterization, which some have gone as far as to denounce as "post-Zionist."⁶

This chapter explores a more specific aspect of the social interface with national security by focusing on Israeli-Jewish public opinion on security matters.⁷ To that end, it will quote extensively from findings of the monthly Peace Index Surveys, a longitudinal research project that monitors Israeli public sentiment on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, relations between Jews and Arabs in Israel and current events of a political or diplomatic nature. These surveys, available at www.peaceindex.org, are based on representative samples of the Israeli Jewish population. They also include representative samples of the Arab population, but as this article deals with the Jewish public, information about the (very different) Arab attitude structure is not presented here.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, it presents the basic structure of security-related public opinion and then focuses on the "world is against us" postulate, which – it is often argued – dominates Israelis' security cognition. Third, it considers public opinion on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the main security challenge. A fourth section outlines the trajectory of the grassroots assessment of the national security situation, while the fifth discusses the public's image of the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) and of political officeholders, the main "providers" of national security. The sixth and last section closes with the location of national security on the public's national-priority scale.

Public opinion and security: a brief overview

In order to place the Israeli case in wider context, we begin with a brief discussion of public

opinion and security in general.

Like its strategic “Siamese twin,” foreign policy, national security (often replaced by “defense,” a term that sounds somewhat more benign to the contemporary Western ear) was historically considered the patrimony of the Brahmin echelons: active (or even retired) statesmen and generals. When security issues demanded special attention – for example, when war loomed on the horizon – some senior diplomats, press commentators, and academics were also allowed to participate in the discourse as a second tier. “Ordinary” citizens, however, were considered by the elites, and admittedly often by themselves, as lacking information and skills needed to contribute productively to the discussion. Hence, notwithstanding overwhelming historical evidence showing that they were clearly the first victims of wrong or hasty decisions and policies, the vast majority of the populace was distanced from the security discourse and decision-making process.

The famous “Almond-Lippmann consensus” conferred an academic seal of approval on the view of security as a matter too complicated for the man – let alone woman – in the street.⁸ This model asserted, and allegedly showed empirically, that public opinion is incompetent and even harmful to balanced and rational decision-making on security. It dominated both political and academic discourse until the 1970s, and to some extent is still influential. However, subsequent practical and theoretical transitions challenged that consensus. For one thing, non-elite participation in the security debate was stimulated by the cumulative impact of the information explosion, a general increase in public education and widened scope of interest, media diversification, and repeated failures by authorized decision-makers to deal effectively with complex international challenges. Additionally, new research projects found the public to be considerably more consistent and knowledgeable than had previously been thought. Especially in the democratic “peace zone,” citizens have also become increasingly reluctant to pay in blood, tears and treasure the price for security experts’ decisions without being given a voice. While this does not mean all security discussions are now transparent or that politicians and generals share their military blueprints and war plans with the public, security has become an integral part of the democratic discourse.⁹

Although similar processes are at work in Israel, for a variety of reasons the country’s security-related public opinion remains somewhat unique. First, contrary to the democratic peace-zone countries, Israel is located in a highly unwelcoming vicinity and from its birth in 1948 has been engaged in an active, violent conflict with hostile, autocratic neighboring states and regional actors. Thus, it does not enjoy any peace-zone benefits.¹⁰ Second, as a relatively young state, Israel does not carry the historical legacy of a tightly knit political and military “aristocracy” distinct from “common” folk. Very few senior IDF commanders belong to military or political “dynasties.”

Third, the Israeli-Jewish majority group operates under the tragic and traumatic impact of the Holocaust, with scholars identifying four “lessons” of the Holocaust highly relevant to the Israeli national security consciousness. Never be a passive victim; never forsake your brethren; never be a passive bystander; never be a perpetrator.¹¹ These four postulates do not encourage a top-down security mentality; on the contrary, they inspire greater public political participation. Last, but not least, whereas most citizens of Western democracies have never engaged in any security-related activity, a very large share (around 60%) of Israel’s (Jewish) population served or serves in the IDF. Thanks to that experience, and to constant exposure to media reports on security matters, the average Israeli feels confident about formulating a solid security worldview.

The Israeli public's security-attitude structure

Views on security matters are the best distinguishing political factor in Israel,¹² the basic groupings or political blocs being: Right, Center and Left. All three are committed to the dominant Zionist ideology, meaning they support the right of the Jewish people to a nation-state of its own and view Israel as the homeland of the Jewish people. However, on security matters they display divergences.

The political Right, now encompassing over half of the Israeli Jewish adult population, emphasizes the historical persecution of the Jewish people in the Diaspora and views the longstanding external threat to Israel's existence as the extension of the historical anti-Jewish legacy. This background explains the Right's reluctance to take any security risks – for example, by making territorial and other compromises – in the context of efforts to resolve the Israeli–Arab/Palestinian conflict. A large share of this political camp comprises traditionalists and religious elements composed of ultra-Orthodox and national-Orthodox Jews. The main political party in this camp is the *Likud*, which, apart from brief intermissions, has led ruling coalition governments since 1977.

Whereas the Israeli political scene was for long bi-polar – with the Right opposing the Left – today around 30%–35% of the Jewish public identifies with the Center. This grouping mostly comprises formerly moderate left-wingers disillusioned by the dead-end situation reached in peace talks with the Palestinians, whom these moderate left-wingers now view as “peace refuseniks” and terror supporters. That said, the Israeli political Center is more open to the idea of territorial concessions in return for peace than is the Right, and holds a less negative view of the international community's intentions. Nevertheless, the common perception in the Center is that the time is not ripe for taking security risks. Hence, its leaders do not support, for example, the immediate establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. In terms of religiosity, most of this political bloc's members are secular (some of them even anti-religious) but it also includes a significant number of traditionalists. Presently, *Yesh Atid* is the Center's principal political party, a position to which the Labor Party now also aspires.

The political Left, until 1977 the dominant camp in Israel and now the smallest of the three main blocs (around 15%–20% of the electorate), views both the international community and the Palestinian/Arab world in a significantly more positive light than both the Right and the Center. According to the Left, responsibility for resolving the conflict with the Palestinians rests with Israel, by virtue of it being the stronger side. Members of this political bloc are therefore open to the possibility of significant territorial concessions, and most still believe in the feasibility of a “two-states-for-two-peoples” solution.¹³ Mostly secular, more highly educated and more prosperous than the national average, the Left is represented by two parties. The larger is the Labor Party; the smaller is *Meretz*, whose platform leans further to the left.

To those unfamiliar with the Israeli domestic scene, the issue of religious observance among the members of the three political blocs calls for some explanation. Much of this is provided in Table 4.1, which displays a segmentation of the political blocs' self-positioning along the religious–secular continuum. Except for the secular segment, split between the Right and the Left, in all other groupings along the religiosity spectrum the majority self-position themselves on the political Right. In other words: the more religious an Israeli individual is, the more likely he or she is to affiliate with the political Right, i.e., to be hawkish on security issues. Conversely, the more secular Israelis are, the more dovish their opinions.

Much has been written in recent years about the “shift to the Right” in Israeli public opinion¹⁵

compared to the 1980s and even the early 1990s, let alone the 1960s and 1970s. However, as Figure 4.1 indicates, since the early 2000s the Israeli public-opinion structure has in fact been generally quite stable.

*Table 4.1. Political (self-) positioning by level of religious observance (% Jews)*¹⁴

Group	Right	Center	Left	Don't know	Total
Ultra-Orthodox	76	12	1	11	100
Orthodox	83	10	3	4	100
Traditional (more religious)	73	14	5.5	7.5	100
Traditional (non-religious)	55	29	14	2	100
Secular	34	28	34	4	100

Source: Tamar Hermann et al. *The Israeli Democracy Index 2017*. Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2017

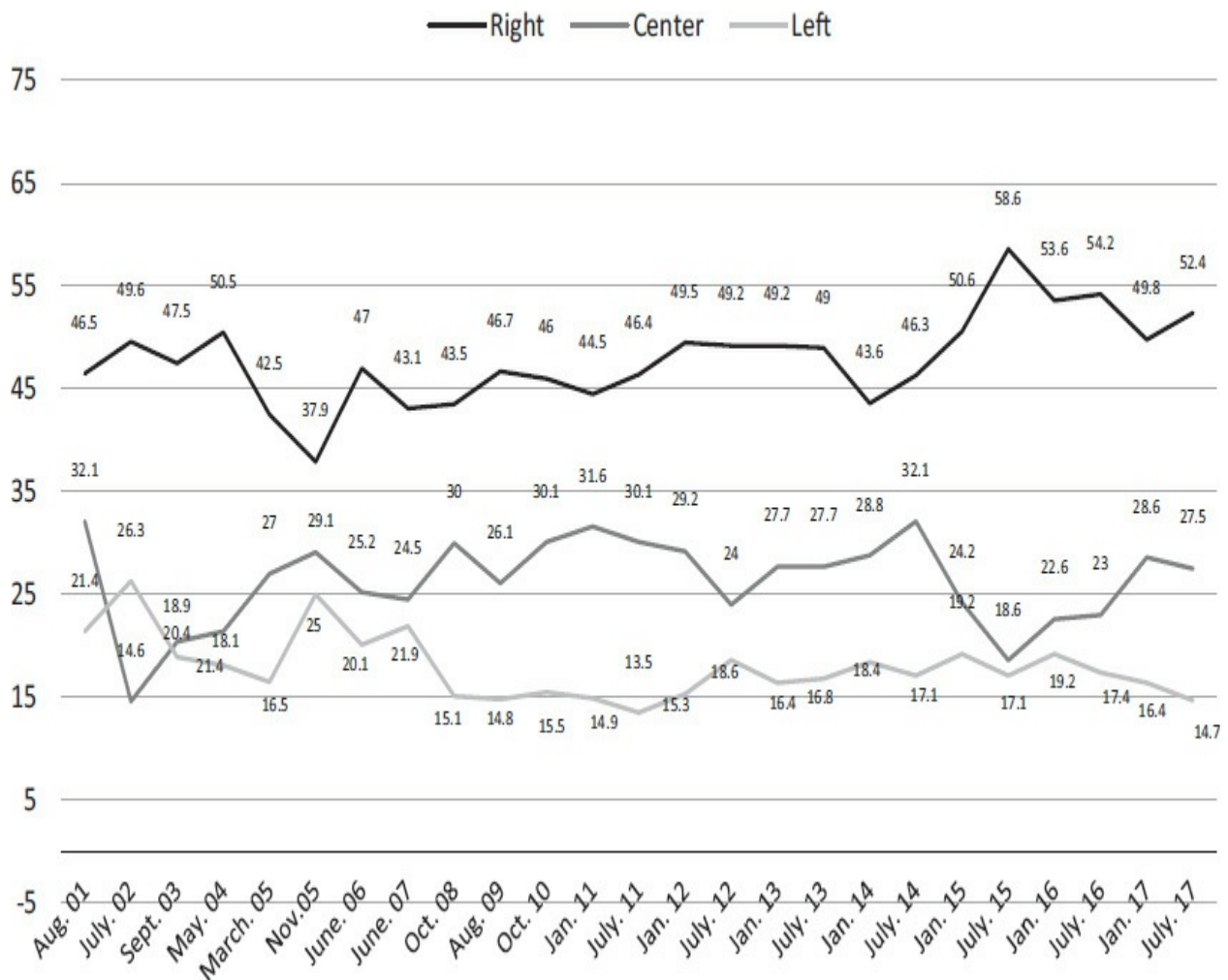


Figure 4.1. The Israeli political-bloc structure (Jews, 2001–2017)

Source: Collated by the author from Peace Index Surveys, 2001–2017.

Source: Peace Index Surveys.

The Right indeed constitutes the largest political bloc. However, in most measurements since

2001, certainly until 2015, it was supported by a plurality, not a majority, of the Israeli-Jewish public. This suggests that the two-bloc structure that characterized Israel in the 1990s was shattered less by a rapid growth of, or electoral shift to, the political Right but rather mostly because the opposing bloc split into two: the rising Center and the diminishing Left. Today, then, the Center is the second largest political camp in Israel and the Left is the smallest. Indeed, one may refer to the Left-to-Center transition as a shift rightward, but it is critical to keep in mind that on issues other than security and foreign affairs, for example human and civil rights, the Center is much closer to the Left than to the Right, and so is its constituency's socio-demographic structure. Thus, contrary to common wisdom, the Right has not really benefited from the shrinkage of the Left and its absolute size has not changed dramatically over the past decade and a half.

Is the entire world against us?

As suggested above, and as will be shown below in greater detail, the current sense of national security among Jewish Israelis is fairly positive. Yet this relative assurance stands on shaky cognitive ground: a prevalent though not all-encompassing assumption is that in the past, present and future, the (gentile) world is basically hostile toward the Jewish people as a nation and toward Israel as the Jewish nation-state. Many Israelis, mainly of the Right but also a significant share of the Center, consider this hostility practically unrelated to Israel's policies and actions.

For example, the May 2010 Peace Index Survey presented the following question:

Recently Israel's status in the international community has deteriorated, and more and more voices even question its right to exist. Do you think there is or is not a connection between this trend and the policy of the current Israeli government?

A segmentation of the answers to this question in the Jewish sector by voting in the 2009 *Knesset* elections showed that most voters for most of the parties saw no connection between Israel's actions and its dismal international situation. However, among voters for parties that then represented the Left and Center – *Kadima*, Labor, *Meretz* and *Hadash* – the majority did identify some or a strong connection. A segmentation of the answers to this question – by degree of belief or skepticism in the possibility that negotiations with the Palestinian Authority would eventually produce peace – suggested two things. First, among those who believed in the possibility of peace (most of whom identified with the political Left and some with the Center), only a minority – 32% – thought there was no connection between Israel's policy and its deteriorating international status. Second, by contrast, a majority of those skeptical of the possibility of peace (mostly affiliates of the political Right) saw no connection between policy and image and said Israel's right to exist would be questioned no matter what it did.

A fairly similar opinion structure repeated itself in August 2010, when respondents in the monthly Peace Index Survey were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the common adage: "the entire world is against us": 54% responded positively and 45% in the negative. A similar question was presented again in the August 2014 Peace Index Survey in the midst of the IDF's "Protective Shield" operation in Gaza. At that point 63% of Jewish respondents agreed Israel operated in a very unfriendly international environment. Here too the differentials as categorized by self-affiliation with a political camp were large: 69% of the Right agreed "The entire world is

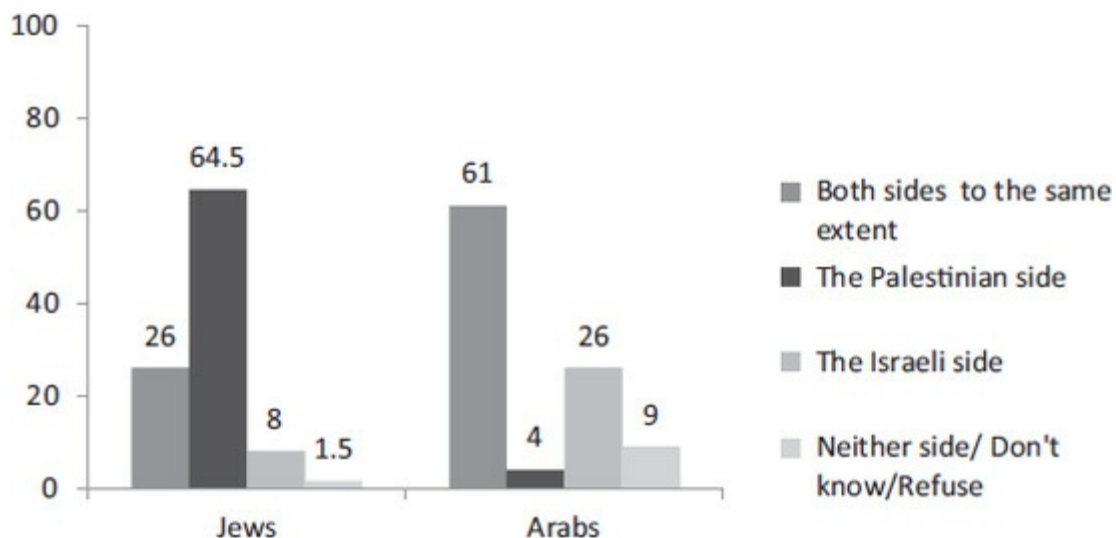
against us,” as did 66% of the Center. On the Left, only a minority of 31% felt that way.

The prevalent perception that Israel confronts a permanently hostile international environment leads many Israelis to support the country acting in accordance with its own understanding of the national interest instead of considering international public opinion. For example: in January 2016, when asked whether the international community’s criticism of Israeli policy takes into equal account the national interests of Israelis and Palestinians, a massive majority (82%) of the Jewish public responded they were sure or thought that the international community did not do so, and in fact heeded Israel’s interests less than those of the Palestinians. Little wonder, then, that when asked whether Israel should or should not relate seriously to the international community’s criticism of its policy in the territories, a majority (56%) responded in the negative. That a similar majority (again 56%) believes the international community will possibly or probably impose substantial pressures on Israel to terminate its control of the territories highlights the significance of that position. In other words, even though a clear and consistent majority of the Jewish public acknowledges the high or moderate chance of external pressures, it is more concerned about its safety than about its international image.

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict: doves and hawks

The public view of the protracted conflict with the Arabs in general and with the Palestinians in particular dovetails perfectly with the “the entire world is against us” adage, and constitutes the crux of the Right–Left division. The location of the individual or group on either side of this cleavage is the strongest signifier in contemporary Israeli politics and society. The protracted conflict is also one of the main reasons Israelis are so intensely interested in national security–related affairs.

As Figure 4.2 shows, most Israeli Jews attribute to the Palestinian side prime responsibility for the repeated failures to reach a peace agreement. Eight percent of the Right expresses that opinion; in the Center about 60% does so. On the Left the majority (53%) apportions blame equally to both sides. According to the August 2017 Peace Index Survey, only 8% of the total sample of Israelis assumed responsibility for the failure to achieve peace. On the Right the figure was 5% and on the Left 15%.



[Figure 4.2 Responsibility for the failure to reach a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians \(% Jews\)](#)

Source: Peace Index Survey, August 2017

Here too the religious factor is highly significant, as is altogether the case in the Right, in the ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox groups large majorities place the blame for failure to attain peace entirely on the Palestinians (83% and 82%, respectively). In both traditional groups, most respondents took the same stand, with the majorities fairly close to that of the Right (63% and 74.5% respectively). Among the secular group, about half were of that opinion.

The more religious an Israeli Jewish individual or a group is, the more pronounced the tendency to blame the Palestinians for passing up peace. At the same time, most Israelis want peace talks to continue, although only a small minority believes they are likely to bear fruit in the foreseeable future. Figure 4.3 indicates this gap between support and belief has been very stable over the years, with support for continued talks always higher than the belief in their potential productivity.

How is the issue of negotiations viewed by the Jewish Right, Center and Left?

Peace Index Surveys for June 2001–April 2017 show that support for negotiations is constantly shared by somewhat less than half of the Right (around 45%), a small majority of the Center (around 55%) and a huge majority of the Left (over 90%). Differences in belief that negotiations might succeed are much sharper. Only 8% of the Right believe that the talks will lead to peace; but 58% (!) of the Left and roughly 30% of the Center do so. On the religious–secular scale, the statistical differences are narrower because, as mentioned earlier, not all secular respondents are located in the Center or Left: 8% of the ultra-Orthodox believe that peace talks could bear fruit. The corresponding figures for Orthodox, traditional groups and secular respondents are, respectively, 7%, 21% and 29%.

The last question addressed in this section is the “two-states-for-two-peoples” solution. It is worth recalling that from the early to mid-1990s to the mid-2000s most Israeli Jews favored that formula, albeit not by a very large margin. However, since the early 2000s faith in its feasibility has gradually eroded among a significant number of its former supporters. The intra-Jewish Right–Center–Left division on this question is pronounced: most Peace Index Surveys have found only about a quarter of the Right voicing support for a two-state-based agreement. In the Center the figure is usually around 60%, while on the Left such an arrangement is favored by a large majority (80% and above). As for the religious–secular scale: among the ultra-Orthodox and Orthodox groups only a small minority (around 25% in both cases, similar to the right-wingers) say that they would support a two-state-based agreement; among the secular group, as in the Left bloc, it is supported by a large majority (over 80%).

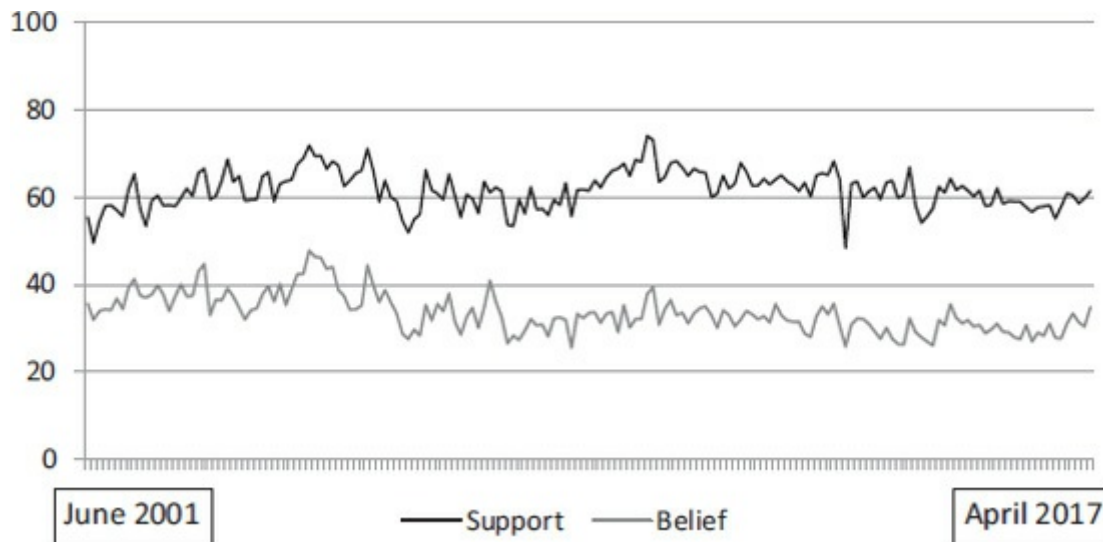


Figure 4.3 Support vs. belief in the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, June 2001–April 2017 (by month)

Source: Compiled from monthly Peace Index, June 2001–April 2017.

The Israeli public’s assessment of the national security state of affairs

The Israeli public’s exceptional interest in the national security debate is one of the main features of the national–political scene. The national security state of affairs is a major item on the agenda, and security-related civic activities such as demonstrations for or against certain government policies, petition-signing campaigns and the like are very common.

The public’s assessment of the national security situation has changed significantly over the years in accordance with objective changes in Israel’s operative regional and international environment and the IDF’s perceived preparedness to deal with potential and actual security hazards. Comparable longitudinal data regarding the public’s national security assessments are unfortunately unavailable. However, various relevant survey questions suggest that a gradual – though nonlinear – upturn has taken place in recent years.¹⁶ Thus, for example, in September 1997, when the Oslo process already seemed to have reached a dead-end and lethal Palestinian terrorist attacks on Israeli civilians occurred almost daily, a 47% plurality of participants in that month’s Peace Index Survey assessed Israel’s national security had deteriorated over the past year. A smaller percentage (41%) assessed that the situation had remained constant, and only a tiny minority (10%) felt at the time that Israel’s national security had improved.

A still more dismal assessment was measured in the Peace Index Survey of October 2000, conducted immediately after the eruption of the Second (*Al-Aqsa*) Intifada. A clear majority (62%) of the respondents then said they perceived a severe threat to Israel’s national security. In May 2001, 83% of the respondents said Israel’s national security had deteriorated since the Oslo process.

In the following years, however, some positive signs could be detected. In the May 2004 Survey, a plurality (37%) answered that Israel’s national security had worsened, but a not much smaller share (31.1%) felt it had not changed, and over 28% even saw an improvement in this sphere. According to the May 2005 Survey, Israeli public opinion was almost evenly split

between 48% who felt there existed almost no threat or no threat at all to Israel's national security – and 49% who thought it was somewhat or seriously threatened. As already noted, the national security assessment trajectory is not linear. Thus, the results of the October 2006 Survey, conducted a few months after the highly controversial Second Lebanon War, reflected the grim public mood: a clear majority of almost 60% said Israel's national security had deteriorated. Yet according to the August 2009 Survey, the public was again almost evenly divided between 37% who assessed Israel's national security situation as “so-so” and 38% who considered it “good “or “very good.”

Likewise instructive is a comparison of the Peace Index Surveys conducted in August 2014 and in February, June and September 2017. The first was taken following Operation Protective Edge, during which the Iron Dome system successfully intercepted almost all incoming rockets from Gaza, thereby boosting many Israelis' sense of being well protected. A plurality (46%) responded that in the wake of the Operation Israel's national security was neither better nor worse; other respondents split evenly between those two positions. In the 2017 Surveys, however, a clear majority of over 60% characterized Israel's national security as good or very good. In September 2017 only 11% of Jewish respondents expected the forthcoming Jewish year to be worse than the previous one in terms of Israel's national security.

Several factors may account for this slow yet fairly consistent, although not necessarily permanent, improvement in public assessments of Israel's national security. One is the apparent weakening or even collapse of Arab regimes and actors previously openly hostile, such as Syria and ISIS. Second, many highly respected Israeli security experts repeatedly confirm the remaining regimes no longer pose a real threat to Israel's security. This largely explains why the repeated warnings by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu about Iran's lethal nuclear plans, whether objectively justified or not, have left large segments of the Israeli public quite indifferent – an altogether unique circumstance demonstrated by the absence of any public panic regarding this issue over the years. Third, in contrast to recurrent warnings of foreign experts and of Israeli figures mainly of the political Left, the standstill in the peace negotiations with the Palestinians has not generated a third *Intifada* or even a dramatic increase in terror activity against Israelis.

That such fears have (thus far?) proven false reinforces the prevalent public impression that national security is well taken care of. One dramatic boost to Israelis' sense of security was President Obama's replacement by President Trump, who openly sides with Israel on almost every security-related issue.¹⁷ Frequent media reports about Israel's flourishing relations with Saudi Arabia and other Persian Gulf states, along with ongoing tight security cooperation with Egypt, have also contributed significantly to this improved sense of national security. Similarly, relative quiet on the Palestinian front has been widely attributed to the high professionalism of the security agencies and not to any strategic decision by the Palestinians to reduce the use of violent means as politically counterproductive. Indeed, overall, widespread public feeling can perhaps best be attributed to an impression that those currently in charge of managing national security are “doing a good job” and are dealing effectively with whatever challenges might emerge in the foreseeable future.

The performance of national security “providers”

There are two kinds of national security providers: political and military.¹⁸ Surveys show that public trust in the latter is consistently higher than in the former. In measurements of Israeli

public trust in state institutions the IDF always comes first – and by a large margin that fluctuates only marginally. Only in 2007, a year after the Second Lebanon War, did measurements indicate public confidence in the army’s competence had been severely – if temporarily – damaged. However, even at that low point, Jewish citizens declared more trust in the IDF (78%) than in any other public institution. The Israel Supreme Court scored 50%, the Police Force 31%, the *Knesset* 30% and political parties just 16%.¹⁹

It is not only general trust that matters. With very few transitory exceptions, Israeli public-opinion polls consistently show high estimates of the IDF’s professional capabilities. For example, a huge majority (88%) of respondents to the Peace Index Survey of June 2017 expressed confidence the IDF would win a war against *Hamas*, Syria, Iran or *Hizbullah*. In the Survey conducted in October 2017, 80% assessed the IDF’s military competence as very good or excellent. This was not an “automatic” response, as in the same measurement the IDF scored significantly lower on gender equality (which only 50% said was good or very good) and financial management (29%). The public’s ability to differentiate between various aspects of the security debate is further revealed by the considerably smaller majority (52%) who gave “good” or “very good” grades to the IDF Chief of Staff, Gadi Eizenkot, reflecting the public’s ability to see the man at the top as a separate entity from the institution he commands.²⁰

What about the political national security providers? As mentioned, these authorities usually enjoy less public trust than the IDF. For example, in June 2017, when the situation in the West Bank was extremely tense, a majority of respondents to the Peace Index Survey (82%) believed the IDF would deal effectively with another Palestinian *Intifada*, which many observers considered to be imminent. Only about half (52%), however, relied on the government to make good decisions in this regard. A month later, only a minority (31%) trusted Netanyahu to manage competently the Temple Mount crisis then raging, while a majority believed he should have listened to the advice of the security forces (which he did not).

[Table 4.2 The place of security \(and peace\) in the Jewish–Israeli national-priority scale, November 1969–October 2017](#)

	Nov. 1969	Aug. 1981	Aug. 1988	June 1992	July 1998	Aug. 2000	March 2008	March 2009	March 2011	April 2012	April 2014	Oct. 2017
Peace (% first priority)	56.8	19.8	18.9	23.7	18.7	18.3	19.4	11.4	14	14.9	8.7	11.5
Place of peace compared to other priorities	1/9	3/8	2/6	1/7	3/4	3/4	1/5	4/6	3/9	3/5	5/5	4/6
Security (% first priority)	12.4	22.1	32.0	22.9	n/a	n/a	n/a	16.4	23.9	12.2	10.4	16.1
Place of security compared to other priorities	2/9	2/9	1/6	2/7	n/a	n/a	n/a	2/6	2/9	5/5	4/5	3/5
Peace + security (%)	69.2	41.9	50.9	46.6	n/a	n/a	n/a	27.8	37.9	27.1	19.1	27.6

Source: Collated by the author from Peace Index Surveys, Nov. 1969–Oct. 2017.

At the same time, in many respects political actors have taken decisions and shaped policies improving public images of Israel’s national security. In fairness, even if not accorded direct credit for that achievement, indirectly it is theirs. Moreover, whereas the IDF is traditionally viewed in Israel as a “national” institution in the profound sense of this term, and as such insulated from political disagreements, politicians are always observed through a political prism. Even when their policies succeed, they are unlikely to win the appreciation of Israelis belonging to other political parties and the opposition bloc.

Security and the national-priority scale

Paradoxically, current sentiment that national security is in good hands and in good shape has apparently served to downgrade the security issue on the Israeli public's national-priority scale. Other issues, mainly the widening social and economic gaps, and the dismal situation of the health and education systems, have been upgraded since the 2011 wave of socio-economic protests.

Table 4.2 shows the relative place of security (and of peace)²¹ on the public's national-priority scale as reflected in a variety of public opinion polls conducted since the late 1960s, when asked which issues the incumbent government should focus on.

This table calls for a more comprehensive examination of public motivations to upgrade or downgrade certain topics on the priority scale. However, it certainly highlights a challenging phenomenon: an improving sense of national security alongside a decline in security's ranking on the public's national-priority scale.

Summary and discussion

The second section of this chapter asserted that national security – a topic once reserved exclusively for statesmen and generals – has since the latter part of the twentieth century been substantially “democratized” and opened to general public scrutiny. Recent research conclusively demonstrates the fallacies in the traditional Almond-Lippmann consensus that public opinion on such issues is volatile, whimsical and uninformed, and hence best distanced from the national decision-making process. Employing empirical data, we have shown that for a variety of external and domestic reasons the Israeli public is exceptionally opinionated about, and involved in, the national security discourse.

Three interrelated issues were then addressed. The Israeli public's basic attitude structure on security issues (with three main political blocs, Right, Center and Left); its overall threat perception (is “the entire world against us?”); and its main positions on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (doves and hawks). Thereafter, the non-trivial, close correspondence between these positions and the Israeli individual's location on the religiosity continuum (from secular to ultra-Orthodox) was demonstrated, after which the essay focused on the trajectory of the Israeli public's assessment of national security. The data sustains the argument that the Israeli public believes the country's security situation to have improved in recent years. It also indicates the IDF heads the list of national security “providers” given credit for that achievement, little of which is directly accorded to the political echelon. The latter finding most likely reflects the tendency of Israeli citizens to assess the performance of decision-makers through a political prism rather than a judgment of their real competence in dealing with security issues.

Of singular importance for the future, the data indicates significant recent shifts in the public's priority scale. “Security” is no longer the paramount issue, probably – albeit paradoxically – thanks to the prevalent sense that it is being handled competently. Instead, that scale is now headed by other issues, primarily domestic socio-economic differentials, the government's handling of which is widely criticized. This non-trivial finding suggests national security is not really Israel's “middle name,” a Moloch that the entire state and society humbly and uncritically extol day and night. This view is sustained by a cluster of other developments, beyond the specific scope of this chapter, such as growing public skepticism about the need for universal

conscription, frequent criticism of the size of the defense budget and the erosion of the formerly unchallenged supremacy of security considerations over all other national priorities.

At the end of the second decade of the 2000s, then, Israel is neither a new Sparta nor a new Athens, but situated somewhere in between those polar opposites.

Notes

- 1 Yagil Levy, "What Is Controlled by Civilian Control of the Military? Control of the Military vs. Control of Militarization," *Armed Forces & Society* 42 (2016): 75–98; Joshua Krasna, "A Guide for the Perplexed: The Israeli National Security Constellation and Its Effect on Policymaking," *The Philadelphia Papers*, no. 17. Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2018.
- 2 Oren Barak, Gabriel Sheffer and Amiram Oren, *An Army That Has a State: New Approaches to Civil-Security Relations in Israel* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008.
- 3 Eliezer Schwartz, *The Development of the Security Budget* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Knesset Center for Information and Research, 2014 and *The Marker* (Hebrew daily), November 2, 2016 .
- 4 Amiram Oren and Rafi Regev, *A Land in Khaki: Land and Security in Israel* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Carmel, 2008.
- 5 Uri Ben Eliezer, *The Making of Israeli Militarism*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- 6 Amos Perlmutter, "The Making of Israeli Militarism: A Review," *Middle East Journal* 54 (2000): 129–131.
- 7 For an updated analysis of Israeli Jewish public opinion at large, see Tamar Hermann, "The Sociodemographic-Political Nexus and the Weakening of the National Consensus," in: Reuven Hazan et al. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Israeli Politics and Society*. Forthcoming.
- 8 Ole Holsti, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: Challenges to the Almond-Lippmann Consensus. Mershon Series: Research Programs and Debates," *International Studies Quarterly* 36 (1992): 439–466.
- 9 Adam J. Berinsky, "Assuming the Costs of War: Events, Elites, and American Public Support for Military Conflict," *Journal of Politics* 69 (2007): 975–997; Brandice Canes-Wrone, *Who Leads Whom? Presidents, Policy, and the Public*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006; Richard Sobel, *The Impact of Public Opinion on U.S. Foreign Policy Since Vietnam: Constraining the Colossus*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- 10 Bruce Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace: Principles for a Post-Cold War World*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- 11 Yechiel Klar, Noa Schori-Eyal and Yonat Klar, "The 'Never Again' State of Israel: The Emergence of the Holocaust as a Core Feature of Israeli Identity and Its Four Incongruent Voices," *Social Forces* 69 (2013): 125–143.
- 12 Tamar Hermann and Ephraim Yuchtman-Yaar, "Divided Yet United: Israeli-Jewish Attitudes Toward the Oslo Process," *Journal of Peace Research* 39 (2002): 597–613.
- 13 Currently, the more radical, usually non-Zionist groupings on the Left tend to prefer a variety of "one state" solutions.
- 14 Tamar Hermann et al., *The Israeli Democracy Index 2017*. Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2017.
- 15 Evelyn Gordon, "Israel's Left-Wing Right Wing," *Commentary*, March 1, 2015. www.commentarymagazine.com/articles/israels-left-wing-right-wing.
- 16 It should be noted, however, that the public's assessment is not necessarily compatible with that of certain academic experts. See, e.g., Uri Bar Joseph, "Our National Security Has Never Been Worse," *Ha'aretz* (Hebrew Daily), January 2, 2018. The author is a professor of political science at Haifa University.
- 17 In mid-2017, 51% of Jewish respondents said that Israel's security was quite or very high on Trump's priority scale when shaping his policies. In January 2018, a majority of the respondents in the Peace Index Survey said that Trump's attitude was more pro-Israeli than pro-Palestinian or neutral.
- 18 Krasna, "A Guide for the Perplexed."
- 19 Hermann et al., *The Israeli Democracy Index 2017*.
- 20 This relatively low assessment is mainly prevalent on the political Right and in the Orthodox sector. It apparently stemmed little or not at all from estimates of Eizenkot's military competence but rather from some highly controversial moves on his part regarding: gender equality, the status of religion and of religious leaders in the military and the correct code of conduct for soldiers in or out of combat missions (mainly the Elor Azaria case; see Chapter 5 by Moran-Yarhi in this volume).
- 21 Because in certain surveys the two issues – peace and security – were presented together while in others they were separated, this table incorporates all modes of presentation.

5

Security issues as mirrored in the digital social media

Moran Yarchi

Security issues invariably relate to prospective conflicts and wars. They generate dramatic, fast-breaking, newsworthy events, fresh in their timing, and readily lend themselves to ongoing interpretation. Consequently, security-related stories satisfy journalistic norms; this insures they will therefore receive a disproportionate amount of media attention, precisely because they provide natural material for reporting and “glue” people to the news.¹

The Israeli media in particular tend to devote inordinate amounts of broadcasting, reading and viewing time to security issues, such as conflicts, terror and wars.² This chapter analyzes the representation of security issues on Israeli social media by tracing the public debate on Facebook over the controversial shooting of an incapacitated Palestinian assailant in Hebron by a soldier on March 24, 2016.

Media and military in Israel

Following the establishment of the State of Israel, the local media cooperated with the government and the various national security agencies in dealing with security issues. Defense matters received ample media coverage, but in conformity with the national narrative voiced little if any criticism, either of the security institutions or of the country’s political leaders. Indeed, Yoram Peri identifies a “self-deprecating press” in the formative relationship between the media and the security establishment from 1948 statehood until the 1973 Yom Kippur War.³

At least three distinctive features set this initial relationship apart from the post-1973 era: (1) state control over the media, (2) suppression of news by the military and (3) endorsement of government policies by patriotic editors and journalists. What resulted was a form of self-censorship carried out through the instrument then known as “the editors’ committee” (*va’adat ha-orchim*). Comprising members of both the press and government, this body would share sensitive information with a few senior media representatives who, in return, would publish this news in a manner that supported the national narrative, or would not publish it at all, in line with official requests.⁴

By exposing fatal political and military shortcomings, the Yom Kippur War fundamentally transformed the nature of relations between the Israeli press and the authorities on the treatment

of security issues. Redefining its role, the media resolved to cover, scrutinize and, when warranted, openly criticize the security agencies and thus treat them in the same way as all other national institutions. Indeed, since the end of the 1980s the word “confrontational” best defines the attitude of the Israeli media towards the security agencies. Today, the media sees itself to be fulfilling a civil and national duty by watching over the entire spectrum of government activities, including the military and other related security agencies.⁵

Changes have been reciprocal. The new media posture, together with technological developments over the past few decades, has transformed how the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) for their part deal with the media. Since the second *Intifada* (2000–2005), especially, the Israeli defense establishment and military have come to appreciate better the impact of media coverage and its effect on public opinion. As a result, they have sought, on balance, to be more open and transparent, while cooperating more closely with journalists.⁶

Despite these changes, two important issues merit consideration when discussing the current relationship. First, even today, Israel maintains military censorship. By law, traditional media outlets have to submit all news stories dealing with security issues to the military censor, whose prior approval is required before publication or broadcast.⁷ Second, although the Israeli media is far less deferential and far more critical of the defense establishment than used to be the case, its behavior does not differ much from that of the press in other democracies around the world.⁸ At times of relative security calm it can be critical. But its coverage of crises and conflicts tends to be emotional, nationalistic, patriotic and supportive of the country’s leadership, whose conduct it does not rush to criticize.⁹ This phenomenon is known as “rallying ’round the flag.”¹⁰

Social media and public debate in the media age

Communication technology profoundly impacts upon the coverage of security issues, especially of conflicts and wars.¹¹ Each new development – the telegraph, radio and television – has revolutionized both the speed of information dispersion and the extent to which people are presented with visual images. The internet in general and social media in particular becoming central arenas for political deliberation,¹² the current reality of digital communication has ushered in yet another new era. So much so that under the current digital reality even in authoritarian regimes political and military leaders find it increasingly difficult to control the flow of information.¹³ Because the transmission of information on social media has become so fast, so easy and so inexpensive, ordinary citizens are able to promote their messages and ideology at will, and virtually without any editing or censorship.¹⁴ Open, democratic societies are even more disadvantaged when dealing with security issues, and especially during military confrontations with authoritarian regimes or non-state actors.¹⁵ During the 2006 Second Lebanon War, for example, one of the largest challenges facing Israeli leaders traced to soldiers using their cell phones to send disturbing information and images back from the front.

The current chapter looks at how security issues are presented on Israeli social media by focusing on the public debate conducted on Facebook – the most popular social network in Israel¹⁶ – over the controversial shooting of an already-wounded Palestinian assailant by an IDF soldier, Elor Azaria, in March 2016. The analysis includes all public Facebook posts (N = 6508) published on the topic between the day of the shooting (March 24, 2016) and the day following the military court’s rejection of Azaria’s appeal against his conviction for manslaughter (July 31,

2017).

The following topics have been selected for close examination: (1) the attention the issue receives; (2) the discourse (supportive of the soldier and his actions, neutral, or opposing Azaria and his actions); (3) salient issues raised by each of the three sub-groups; and (4) the degree of engagement (in terms of likes, shares and comments). Two further aspects worthy of consideration are: (5) the nature of the interaction between users regarding the Azaria incident and (6) shared issues raised by users posting messages, regardless of their political views. The latter subject is of particular interest in questioning whether users interact with people holding opinions different to theirs as opposed to discussion within so-called echo chambers,¹⁷ which expose users solely to information akin to their own.

The Elor Azaria incident: a case study

On March 24, 2016, two Palestinian assailants stabbed and wounded an Israeli soldier in the Tel Rumeida neighborhood of Hebron, a city on the West Bank. In response, they were shot by IDF personnel. One was killed and the other, Abed al Fatah al-Sharif, seriously wounded and “neutralized.” A few minutes after the incident, Elor Azaria, an IDF soldier, arrived at the scene and – without orders to do so – shot the incapacitated Palestinian assailant in the head, killing him. Azaria was promptly arrested, and a military investigation opened.

A video clearly showing Azaria shooting al-Sharif from close range went viral on Israeli social media, sparking a heated public debate and instant controversy among Israelis of all walks of life over how IDF soldiers are expected to implement rules of engagement in the face of Palestinian violence. A parallel debate took place inside the political system and the government. The Defense Minister at the time of the shooting, Moshe Ya’alon, described the incident as a violation of the army’s ethical code. Other politicians, such as Minister of Education Naftali Bennett and former Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, expressed support for the soldier’s actions.

Azaria’s trial on the charge of manslaughter opened before a military tribunal on May 9, 2016, even as public debate over the incident raged outside the courtroom. Azaria’s defense rested on his belief the assailant carried an explosive device that, despite his mortal wounds, he was about to activate. The prosecution claimed Azaria acted in a spirit of revenge, offering in evidence quotes he allegedly had made at the time of the shooting. On January 4, 2017, Azaria was convicted of manslaughter by the military court. His sentence, pronounced on February 21, was demotion from his rank of sergeant and an 18-month prison term, to be followed by 12 months’ probation. On July 30, the military court rejected the appeal filed by his lawyers, with the judges reiterating their opinion that Azaria’s version of events was unreliable. He then appealed for leniency to IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot, who reduced his sentence to 14 months’ imprisonment, to commence on August 9, 2017.

Before moving to a presentation and interpretation of our data set on social media relative to this episode, it is important to outline the context of analysis provided by the media environment, both in Israel and elsewhere, prevalent at the time of the Azaria controversy.

Social media discourse: a balance sheet

Social media were perceived initially as neutral, egalitarian, objective and democratic. They were

hailed as platforms on which all users could publish messages and opinions to followers and friends in an uncensored and unfiltered way, bypassing journalists and editors – the gatekeepers of the traditional media. The present reality, however, is far more complicated.

These plaudits meshed with general celebrations of the internet's growth and its expansion to social media in particular. Especially praised were the social media's potential for enhancing civic engagement, indirectly contributing to the functioning of democracy by promoting diversity of opinion, freedom of association and liberty.¹⁸ Online communication certainly brings together minority or marginalized groups in different geographic locations, making them feel empowered. It also provides everyone with easy access to constructive information.

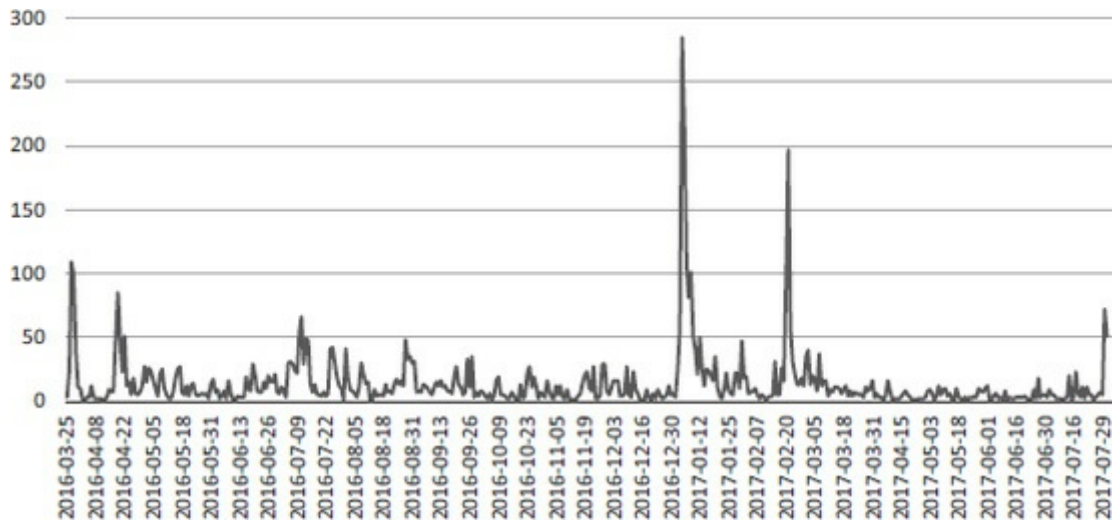
However, online communication also has negative ramifications, since it fosters isolation and lends itself to undermining civic engagement. Because there is no official censorship of social media, and because users are both consumers and producers of information, anyone can promote any information they see fit. One consequence is that users can thereby be easily exposed to negative publications spewing hate speech, violent content, etc. Another is that they are provided with access to postings and publications offering similar views to their own, creating “echo chambers” or “filter bubbles,” which reinforce users' worldview and pre-determined convictions, and may lead to a more polarized discussion on a given issue. Nor, for added measure, are social networks entirely free from gatekeepers, since Facebook and others regulate users' behavior and exposure according to certain values and interests.¹⁹ In sum, such realities can effortlessly polarize society and its discussion of any given subject.

The Elor Azaria affair underscores these and other issues.

A society divided

In the period between March 24, 2016 and July 31, 2017, both the shooting incident in which Azaria was involved and his subsequent trial generated an inordinate amount of social media attention. The analysis, for example, is based on 6,508 posts (an average of over 13 publicly open posts a day) and 76,172 comments written by 24,607 Facebook users. Figure 5.1 presents the frequencies of the public Facebook posts dealing with the Elor Azaria incident.

As this figure shows, discussion of the case on social media took place continuously throughout the period of the analysis, although dramatic turning points had a surge effect on the public discourse. The high watermark of media traffic as evidenced in the highest number of posts (285) published on Facebook on any single day came on January 4, 2017 – the day Azaria's verdict was announced by the military court. The second closest peak of attention (197 posts) was on February 21, 2017 – the day the military court pronounced Azaria's sentence. Other dates of extensive attention were April 19, 2016 (85 posts) – when the largest demonstration in support of Azaria was held in Tel Aviv; and July 30, 2017 (72 posts), the day the military court announced its rejection of Azaria's appeal.



[Figure 5.1](#) Distribution of the publicly open Facebook posts dealing with the Elor Azaria incident, March 24, 2016 to July 31, 2017

Source: Collated by author

We now turn to the substantive discourse surrounding the affair: whether supportive of the soldier and his actions, neutral, or opposed to the soldier and his actions. The overall findings suggest strong support, with 3,276 of the analyzed posts endorsing Azaria’s action, 2,974 neutral and only 253 in opposition to the soldier and his actions.

What we can safely infer from this finding is that the Israeli public readily participates in discussions dealing with security issues. Moreover, an attentive public can adopt views contrary to the official stand of the security agencies (in this case, the IDF). Figure 5.2 presents the distribution of supporting, neutral and opposing posts between March 24, 2016 and July 31, 2017.

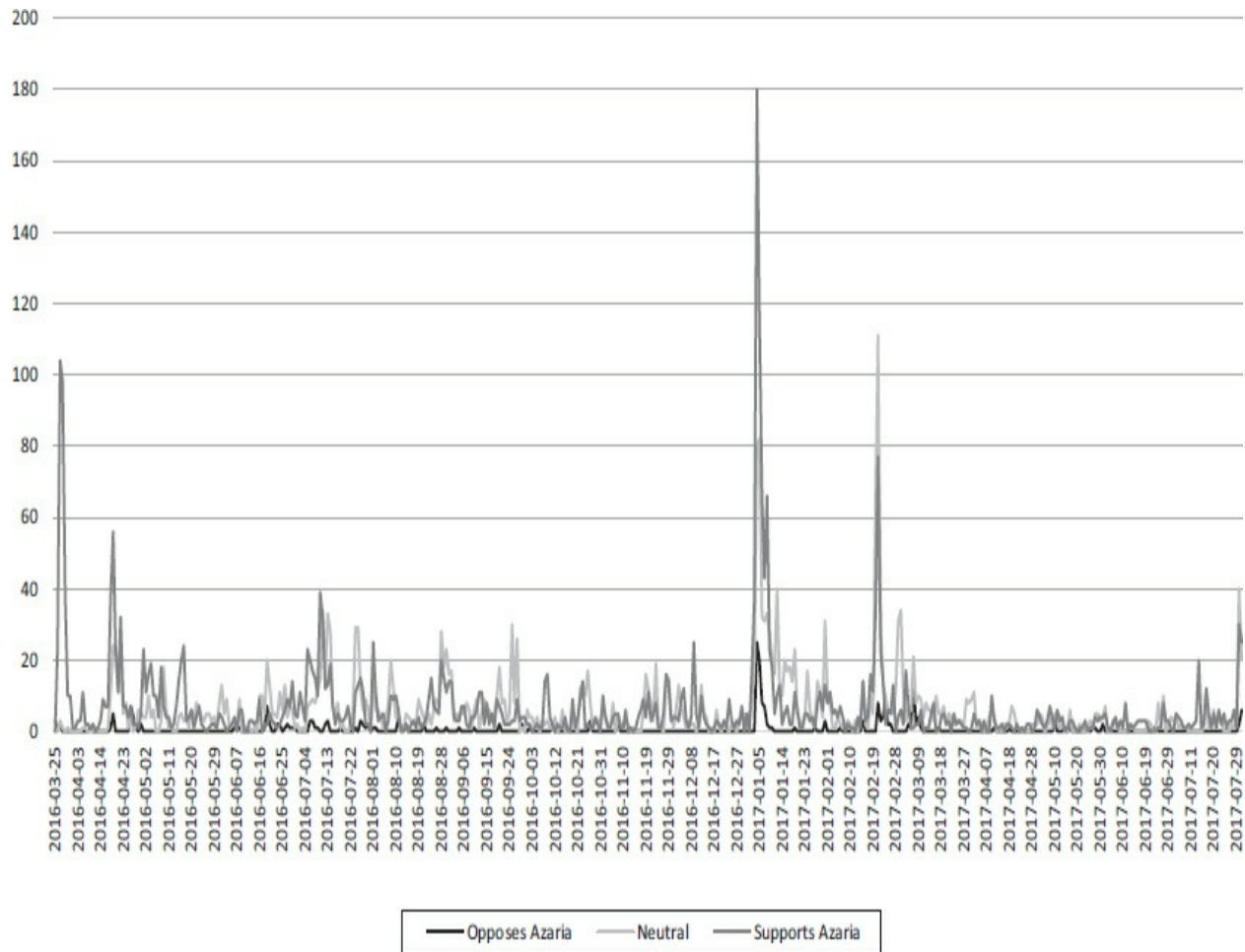
Overall, expressions of support for Azaria and his actions dominate the timeframe of this study. During the first phase, before the soldier’s trial opened on May 9, supportive posts led the Facebook discourse. They continued to do so throughout the legal proceedings, even as a more neutral, informative pattern slowly developed. Consequently, although 180 supportive posts steadfastly backed the accused on the day of the verdict, thereafter the more neutral trend gained ascendancy until by the day of the sentencing neutral posts outnumbered those expressing support (111 to 77). On the day the military court rejected Azaria’s appeal, the margin in favor of neutral posts on Facebook was 40–30. Interestingly, only about 4% of postings on the issue unequivocally opposed Azaria and his actions. However, as Figure 5.2 shows, on the day of the verdict the number of opposing posts spiked (to 37). A possible explanation for that phenomenon is provided by the theory termed “the spiral of silence.”²⁰ In this view, many people holding moderate, opposing or unpopular views may feel more comfortable expressing them only when a disputed episode has reached a final outcome – in this instance, the military tribunal’s verdict. They interpreted this ending as a confirmation and even vindication of opinions that they had suppressed during the trial, when vocal support for Azaria and his actions dominated.

By identifying recurrent terms and key words, content analysis facilitates a better understanding of the actual content of the messages promoted by supporters of Azaria, his opponents and the neutral publications. Unsurprisingly, and irrespective of the opinions expressed, the three different types of posts employ common terminologies. They all refer to the

name of the soldier, the place of the incident (Hebron), the military (specifically, the IDF), terrorism and, to be sure, the issue of security. An important and relevant finding for our purposes here is that approximately 13% of the postings deal specifically with the topic of security, emphasizing that the incident was widely perceived by the public as security-related.

As might be expected, a user's core worldview affects the way he or she frames and presents his or her argument. Postings in support of Azaria and his actions used common terms; "*Kulanu*" ("all of us") appeared in 29% of the cases, mostly in the context of "all of us support Elor." "Release," in the sense of a need to release the soldier, was also used frequently (22% of supportive posts), followed by references to Azaria as a "hero" (19%), as well as the term "*ha'am*" ("the people"), mostly in the context of "the people support Azaria." Another popular term was "pardon" (appearing in 16% of the supportive posts). Many posts mentioned "abandonment" (11 percent), thereby condemning Azaria's military superiors for allegedly sacrificing him by not providing him with proper backing.

As might also be expected, an examination of the postings critical of Azaria reveals an entirely different narrative. First, 36% of the opposing posts cited the need for "punishment" in light of his actions. Second, the word "murder" appears in 29% of them. Third, 26% refer to "occupation" and 21% to "morals," with some explicitly calling the soldier's conduct "immoral." Other topics that stand out in the opposing discourse are: "imprisonment" (11 percent) and "incitement" (9 percent) – mostly when accusing Azaria supporters of incitement against public figures involved in the case (such as the IDF Chief of Staff, and the judges during the trial). Hence, while the contesting social media publications may have addressed similar issues, the narrative presented in the opposing posts – focusing on the crime (murder, immoral actions) and the need for punishment – is qualitatively very different to that found in supportive posts.



[Figure 5.2 Distribution of the supporting, neutral and opposing posts published on Facebook, March 24, 2016 to July 31, 2017](#)

Source: Collated by author

The next stage of the analysis examines differences in the degree of engagement generated by Facebook posts that again either supported or opposed Azaria, or adopted a neutral position. Measured on a sliding scale, these are classified as “likes” (the least obligating engagement indicator, signified simply by pressing the “like” button),²¹ “shares” and “comments” (applied when users go further and are prepared to post a message on their own page). The results are presented in Table 5.1.

Most liked and shared posts are neutral in terms of their content, while the post receiving the largest amount of comments supported Azaria and his actions. Next examined in Table 5.2 are differences in engagement generated by supportive, neutral and opposing posts.

This examination reveals interesting findings. Most of the posts published on Facebook supported Azaria and his actions between the day of the shooting and the end of Azaria’s trial (the announcement regarding the rejection of his appeal). Yet those posts did not generate more user engagement in terms of the number of people willing to share them on their wall [$F(2,6508) = 0.834; N.S.$], or the number of comments provoked [$F(2,6508) = 0.971; N.S.$]. The only significant difference lies in the number of people pressing the “like” button [$F(2,6508) = 3.042; P < 0.05$]; posts that expressed support towards Azaria had received significantly more likes ($M = 93.73$;

SD = 388.30) than posts that had opposed Azaria and his actions (M = 36.87; SD = 120.56), while no significant differences were found between neutral posts (M = 74.64; SD = 485.91) and the other types of posts. This evidence suggests that the small number of posts opposing Azaria were as popular as the vast amount of posts supporting him, in terms of social media users' engagement.

[Table 5.1 Descriptive statistics of the number of likes, shares and comments of the Facebook posts analyzed in the study](#)

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Minimum, maximum</i>
Likes	538,812	82.79	429.54	0, 18,473
Shares	67,181	10.32	78.62	0, 3,768
Comments	76,172	11.70	88.26	0, 4,582

Source: Collated by author

[Table 5.2 Differences in the amount of engagement generated by posts that support Elor Azaria, neutral posts and posts that oppose Azaria](#)

	<i>Posts that support Azaria</i>	<i>Neutral posts</i>	<i>Posts that oppose Azaria</i>
Number of likes	93.73 ^b	74.64 ^{ab}	36.87 ^a
Number of shares	11.36 ^a	9.55 ^a	5.93 ^a
Number of comments	10.19 ^a	13.28 ^a	12.70 ^a

Note: Entries are means as appeared on a one-way ANOVA analysis (with post-hoc Tukey test). Groups with the same letter do not have significant differences; all other differences are significant ($p \leq .05$).

Source: Collated by author

The last issue presented for analysis looks at the question of what role the present-day social media plays in our lives? Do they indeed allow us to be exposed to *more* information and to a *variety* of information? Or do social media simply create “filter bubbles” or “echo chambers,” surrounding us with opinions that are close to our own?²² And in our case, what types of interaction by Facebook users transpired with rival posts (supportive, neutral or opposing) and opinions about the Azaria incident, even those far removed from their own staked out position?

The examination uses Pearson's correlations between the number of comments users took the time to write in response to posts that supported Azaria and his actions, neutral posts and posts that had opposed Azaria and his actions. The findings reveal very interesting trends: a strong, positive and significant correlation ($r = 0.602$; $P < 0.001$) between the number of comments users wrote in regard to supportive and neutral posts. The more users commented on posts supporting Azaria, the more they also reacted to neutral posts. This finding is logical, since the neutral posts were either informative or posed questions about the incident – hence, people who were involved with the issue were more likely to react and engage with those messages. Weak, positive and significant correlations were found between the number of comments users had written in regard to supportive and opposing posts correlation ($r = 0.215$; $P < 0.001$), and between the number of comments users had written in regard to opposing and neutral posts correlation ($r = 0.230$; $P < 0.001$).

Although the correlations are weak, it appears that people involved with the Azaria incident did tend to engage with posts that deal with the topic, even if the publications presents views different than their own.* Therefore, the findings suggest that social media can and do allow for open discussion. They create an environment in which users can should they wish, (a) be

exposed to various types of posts; (b) present their views and opinions while commenting on them and (c) do not necessarily restrict themselves to interacting solely and exclusively with those posts and people sharing and representing their own views.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the representation of direct security issues or security-related issues in the social media realm. As illustrated by the Facebook public discussion regarding the Elor Azaria incident, the Israeli public is inclined to use social media platforms for political deliberation and for venting individual opinions, including on issues of national security.²³ Similar to trends in traditional media coverage, social media discussions on security issues in Israel are stimulated by unfolding events and occurrences, as patently evident in posting trends centering on the Azaria incident. The data reveals that the most frequent timings of Facebook publication clustered around two principal foci: the announcement of the verdict and the passing of sentence on the soldier. Other significant but less dramatic events during Azaria's trial provided a tertiary stimulant.

Content analysis of the Facebook posts reconfirms that the current social media realm really does allow users to express their views freely, even to the point that average citizens are able to criticize the security agencies. In Azaria's case, the military as a whole came in for censure, mostly in posts defending the soldier and his actions, but also in those accusing the military of not shielding Azaria. Somewhat surprising is that for the most part the social media traffic dealing with the incident engendered pretty much the same amount of users' engagement (with the exception of the "like" measurement), even though posts supporting Azaria were much more frequent. Contrary to the literature,²⁴ in going over the commenting patterns of Israeli Facebook users we find they did react to, comment upon and actually interact on various types of posts across ideological and political lines. That is, exchanges took place between posters supportive of the soldier and his actions, those that were neutral/informative and those opposing Azaria and his actions. This finding suggests that even when dealing with a highly controversial security issue, social media do allow and perhaps even indirectly encourage users holding opposing views to engage one another in an online discussion, rather than necessarily keeping them confined in insulated "filter bubbles" or narrow "echo chambers."

It would appear that the internet in general and social media in particular serve as alternative outlets of information for the public. These outlets can actually provide alternative viewpoints and interpretative analyses to representation of an issue by the traditional media. Moreover, social media publications on a certain issue, especially one that has gone viral, can then impact on the way in which the traditional media present the same issue, thereby affecting views of the (Israeli) public at large on the matter at hand. This reality in itself changes the old rules of the game. By operating autonomously – uncensored and unfiltered – social media publications pose fresh and unprecedented challenges to national security agencies, which no longer possess exclusive control over the flow of information

A methodological note

In order to obtain a wide understanding of the public discussion on Facebook regarding the Elor Azaria incident, I conducted a content analysis of all the publicly open Facebook posts (N =

6508) published on the topic between the day of the shooting (March 24, 2016) and the day following the military court's rejection of Azaria's appeal (July 31, 2017). The analysis included both human coding and computerized content analysis components. All data were collected using the software of Buzzilla, an Israeli social media and online representation trend-tracking company. Using related search terms, such as the name "Elor Azaria," all the posts that were published in a publicly open manner* on Facebook between March 24, 2016 and July 31, 2017, were retrieved. A total of 6,995 posts were identified as Facebook publications related to the topic. Since the current analysis focuses on the public discussions, all posts that were published by media outlets (such as Ynet, *Ha'aretz*, Israel Hayom, Mako, etc.) were excluded from the analysis. Altogether, 6,508 posts were analyzed.

The analysis included the following stages. First, the content of the publications was coded in order to identify whether each post supported Azaria and his actions, was neutral or opposed Azaria and his actions. Supportive posts can either fully support Azaria's act (stating that he was right to act the way he did) or claim that, regardless of his actions, people should support him as an IDF soldier defending the people of Israel. Neutral posts are either informative publications (similar to news updates – they provide information about the occurrences), or messages that question whether Azaria acted properly (some present the views of both sides as arguments). Opposing posts criticized Azaria's actions and claimed he should be put on trial. The coding was done by two coders who underwent training. A reliability test based on a random sample of 684 Facebook posts showed high levels of agreement between the coders (Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient no lower than .94). At the second stage of the analysis, the words used in the discourse of each of those three groups of posts (supporting Azaria, neutral and opposing Azaria) were identified through a computerized content analysis using R software. This analysis provides us with a better understanding regarding the online discourse, since it enables us to examine which terms and issues are unique to each group, and which are shared by all of them (regardless of their stand on the issue). In addition to the analysis of the content, the popularity of the Facebook publications was examined using three users' engagement measurements: the number of likes, shares and comments each post had received. Those engagement measurements provide additional information regarding the online discourse, as it allows us to understand the reactions of Facebook users to those publications and examine which of them had generated more online attention. The last stage of the analysis included an examination of the unique users that had commented on each of the posts, in an attempt to identify whether Facebook users interact with various posts and opinions on social media while dealing with security issues, or whether they tend to react only to posts that present the same opinion. Altogether, 76,172 comments written by 24,607 Facebook users were examined.

Notes

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discussions (and not information published to “friends” only). Although this is a limitation of the analysis, since we cannot learn about all the publications on a specific topic, most social media users are usually exposed to public discussions when dealing with political issues. If so, using these posts to analyze the messages appearing on social media should provide an accurate picture of the public discussion dealing with the political or security issues – such as the Elor Azaria incident.

6

Settlements and security

A debate¹

Gershon Hacohen and Shaul Arieli

The settlements – a security asset

Gershon Hacohen

Strictly in terms of Israeli security, two arguments underpin the proposition that Jewish settlements in Judea and Samaria constitute an asset. With the Jordan River providing vital strategic and defensive depth, the first argument points to the sheer impossibility of defending Israel's heavily concentrated population along the narrow Mediterranean coastal strip without (a) direct and (b) effective control of the area to its east. The second and related argument rehearses the cornerstone of traditional security doctrine and views civilian West Bank communities as essential for maintaining this direct and effective control.

A word on basic ideological assumptions

Alternative definitions of national interests and of national security, together with disagreements over the hierarchy of national priorities, inevitably yield markedly divergent strategic assessments. Hence, whether settlements in Judea and Samaria are a security asset or burden cannot be gauged solely by professional security criteria, which are essentially technical and tactical. On the other hand, that a strategic position rests on one's basic assumptions does not necessarily preclude rational, informed and professional discussion.

In debating national interests in Judea and Samaria, one school of Israeli thought accepts the wisdom of renouncing territorial aspirations beyond the June 4, 1967 borders and the need to do so. A second, rival school aspires to a patrimony extending beyond these frontiers and expresses a readiness to struggle to make this a living reality. Full disclosure of these fundamental yet contradictory premises at least prepares the way for an open, in-depth professional exchange.

All such discussions must begin by recognizing that aspirations to control the western Land of Israel did not originate with the end of the Six-Day War. Much earlier, anticipating forthcoming debate in the United Nations on a plan by UN envoy Count Folke Bernadotte for ending the

ongoing War of Independence, Premier Ben-Gurion explained:

I stand with those who do not believe that there is a contradiction between the claim to the entire Western Land of Israel as a Jewish State, and an agreement to the founding of a state on only part of Western Israel. We demanded what we deserved and we got what we could get, but we never declared that that was our maximum, and we consistently emphasized that this is our minimum.²

Strategic depth

Over 60% of Israeli Jews live on the coastal plain between Hadera in the north and Rehovot to the south. A densely populated urban concentration by any international standard, this narrow strip of land between Netanya on the sea and Tulkarm to the east is only 15 kilometers (9.3 miles) wide. The steep gradient of the descent towards the coastal plain from the hills of Samaria and Judea provides whoever is positioned on their western slopes with distinct advantages in sighting targets and in directing lines of fire all the way to the Mediterranean shoreline.

The standard two-state solution as embodied, for example, in the December 2000 Clinton Parameters, dictates almost complete withdrawal by Israel to the 1949 or pre-1967 armistice lines. The resulting border and the IDF's front line would revert to the western foothills of Judea and Samaria along the present alignment of Highway 6, thereby burdening the IDF with a long, extended defense perimeter, lacking territorial depth and permanently vulnerable to the threat of high trajectory fire as well as surprise attack. If, heaven forbid, a Palestinian state were to be established adjacent to the 1967 lines, the coastal strip would revert to being a vulnerable, exposed area lacking the security-in-depth required for effective defense, as was the case prior to 1967.

At a seminar held at Tel Aviv University in April 1979, the security experts of the day discussed the meaning of Israel's peace treaty with Egypt in light of withdrawal from Sinai and the loss of strategic depth in the southern front.³ Interestingly, in his opening lecture Professor Joshua Prawer presented the Crusaders' understanding of territorial requirements for defending the Land of Israel. By the thirteenth century, they had laid out a chain of fortresses, thereby acknowledging that there is no existential logic in holding the coastal towns without controlling the Sinai from the southwest and the mountain ridges facing the east bank of the Jordan River.

No less remarkably, none of the speakers dismissed the indispensable value and vital importance of spatial depth as a prerequisite for effective defense even under modern conditions of warfare. General Aharon Yariv defined "strategic depth" as

the territory between the front-most line up to the position where the state can maintain its military forces for its defense (hereafter "the front line") without infringing on the sovereignty of another state and its vital territory.⁴

According to this accepted working definition, in the event of a full military withdrawal and redeployment, Israel's existing strategic depth once again would be constricted to the narrow coastal strip at the foot of the hills.

Worth noting is that in addition to population density there are absolutely vital strategic assets located in this small area, including Ben-Gurion International Airport, the Ashdod Port, several

power stations, bank management centers, computerized databases, vital IDF installations and the main headquarters in Tel-Aviv of the entire security establishment, including the General Staff, the *Mossad* and the General Security Service (*Shabak*). These primary security assets are exposed to full observation from the slopes of the mountains and can be targeted even by rockets with a firing range of under 40 kilometers.

General Yariv added at the time:

A full expression of the concept of strategic depth can be given only if we add the following data: the length of the front line, the relation between the length of this line and the size of the space to be protected.

The implication of this statement for protecting the coastal plain emphasizes the magnitude of the operational difficulty stemming from the problematic relationship between the length and width of this strip.

Prime Minister Ehud Barak, who at Camp David in 2000 so “benevolently” agreed to surrender the Jordan Valley, surely remembers that, when IDF Chief of Staff, he defined Israel’s defense perimeter as extending from the River Jordan to the ridge lines in central Samaria (Mount Eval, Mount Gerizim, Tapuach, etc.).⁵ Evidently, in 2000 his hopes for a political peace breakthrough outweighed strictly military and security considerations.

In light of long-range rocket threats, and especially after the Iraqi missile attacks on Israel during the 1990–1991 Gulf War and the pledge of Gaza Strip and West Bank withdrawals in the 1993 Oslo Accords, the anti-settlement withdrawal school of thought argues that territorial depth has become irrelevant in this modern age.

From every possible professional viewpoint, however, this argument is not remotely realistic. Firing range determines advance warning time and the likelihood of a rocket being intercepted. Furthermore, the appearance of high trajectory fire has not eliminated the threat of a major ground attack. Saddam Hussein’s Iraqi armored divisions may no longer feature in Israel’s menu of dangers from the east, but there exist new threats. Iranian Shi’ite militias, for instance, might infiltrate the hypothetical Palestinian state and position themselves just beyond our borders. Hence, the depth of defensive fighting space accorded to the IDF remains significant in security planning.

In a large-scale exercise in September 2017, the IDF defended the Lebanese front in a scenario posed by *Hizbullah*’s incursion against frontline settlements. The exercise in practicing forced evacuation of residents exposed tactical disadvantages attributable to the absence of spatial depth. The question here is whether, in the face of a similar threat on the eastern front following withdrawal to the 1967 lines, hundreds of thousands of civilians in Kfar Saba, Rosh Ha’ayin, Elad and Modi’in thus would be threatened with withdrawal as residents of “front-line border settlements.”

Senior officials in the defense establishment who support military and settlement withdrawal as part of the two-state solution admit that were a future threat to arise from the Palestinian territory the IDF would again be compelled to carry out a major ground offensive in order to ensure its elimination. But this is to ignore the experience of the tactics adopted by the enemy in the 2006 Second Lebanon War and in three campaigns in the Gaza Strip since the disengagement in 2005, which demonstrate the new and adverse conditions of war. For instance, an IDF campaign against Arab urban concentrations in Judea and Samaria must confront serious operational difficulties. Logistically, these include organizing coastal assembly points that are

exposed to observation and fire from the slopes; and then maneuvering along mountain routes in densely populated urban areas likely to offer stubborn resistance, as was encountered in Lebanon.

Mindful of these and other operational constraints, in addressing the *Knesset* in October 1995, the late Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin stipulated three principles for any agreement with the Palestinians. First, the integrity of a united Jerusalem in its broadest application. Second, retaining control of the Jordan Valley “in the widest interpretation of this concept, as an eastern security border.” Third, defining the Palestinian state as “less than a state.”⁶ Successor Prime Ministers Barak and Olmert conceded all three principles.

Realistically, any peace agreement is at best conditional. Security planning must consider the future and the contingent beyond a Middle East horizon still invisible; neither can Israel afford to assume serious risks. The inescapable conclusion is that exclusive, direct Israeli control over the area east of the 1949, pre-1967 Green Line – providing a margin of strategic depth in defending the coastal core – is critical for Israel.

The role of settlements in IDF defense doctrine

From the very beginning of the Zionist enterprise, frontier settlement clusters have played a central role in the dual concept of defense and security. In paying tribute to the fallen Gush Etzion settlers in the 1948 battle for Jerusalem, Yigal Allon wrote:

From the founding of Petach Tikva [in 1878] until the establishment of the State in 1948, the areas of Jewish settlement and pioneering settlement, in practice were a definitive factor in the fixing of the areas of Jewish control of the Land of Israel. To the extent that agricultural settlement was successful, and in consequence the urban and industrial development, in striking its roots in greater areas of the Land, so the basis of our national existence also expanded in its striving for renewed national independence.⁷

This approach continued to prevail following Israel’s establishment. Moreover, its validity has not diminished and, if anything, intensifies. Absent civilian settlers, the security forces by themselves would have difficulty maintaining Israel’s sovereignty and authority. This applies not only to Judea and Samaria but also to the Galilee and to the Negev.

Israel Baer, who in the 1950s held a position in the IDF parallel to today’s Head of the Planning Division, clearly set out the complementary role of spatial defense in the Israeli security concept:

The principle upon which the concept of spatial defense is based, involves the military preparation of the populace to stand up to those who attack their place of residence and work, as well as a combination of the creative economic factor and the military defensive factor.⁸

Baer’s approach derived from lessons of World War II. Since then, even though modern warfare has changed shape and logic, Israel still requires a defensive posture incorporating settlements spread over the entire expanse of territory, as mirrored in the fight against terrorist and guerilla movements originating from within the Arab population. Increased mobilization of irregular

terrorist cells with easily concealed weaponry or a roadside bomb activated by remote control point to the enduring relevance of dispersed local and residential Jewish communities in effectively coping with these and other threats.

Opponents of the settlement enterprise ask why – even if IDF soldiers are compelled, until further notice, to conduct security operations in the disputed territories – must there be an Israeli *civilian* presence? Do not the settlers, their families and settlements place an additional security burden on the IDF?

Underlying these questions is the liberal Western notion that distinguishes between professional armed forces exclusively entrusted with the use of force and civilians who restrict themselves entirely to civil society. This notion of separate, dichotomous spheres, however desirable in theory, is wholly impractical in Israel's case, especially considering the frequency of external crises or conflicts calling for total mobilization of national and human resources.⁹ With its “citizens’ army” and military reserve system; with a thin line between the private and the collective, and West Bank military camps located immediately adjacent to isolated civilian settlements – Israeli life and society defy forced distinctions.

By the same token, integrating civilians into spatial defense may be regarded as outmoded, even by some within Israel's defense establishment. Yet, in my understanding of Israel's security needs and social value system, a mobilized society – especially one in which a pioneering spirit is a constitutive element in the lifestyle of citizens in the peripheral areas – continues to be a cornerstone of the national security concept. Refusing to acknowledge the shift from a collective socialist orientation to a liberal social-democratic orientation, or the total decline of the pioneering ethos, the settlers – especially in the ideological settlements – see themselves today continuing the path of the pre-state pioneering workers’ parties.¹⁰

Providing a population mass

Rather than requiring IDF protection, the settler presence in Judea and Samaria actually augments the army's effectiveness. Without the large-scale Jewish settlement now expanding throughout Judea and Samaria the army would be hard pressed to effectively carry out its operational role, including demonstrating a strong physical presence. Following Operation Defensive Shield in 2002, for example, Jewish settlements, such as Har Bracha on Mount Gerizim, provided IDF forces with a protected exit point for successive operations inside Nablus. Without a fully mobilized reserve system, IDF regular forces possess neither the ability to hold out nor the quantitative presence required to maintain adequate bases in the area.

In this context, we need to examine the root cause of the disastrous helicopter collision of February 1997, during the fighting inside the security zone in Lebanon. While the collision evidently resulted from navigation failure, why did helicopters have to ferry combatants to posts deep inside the zone? The answer is that with insufficient ground forces, the IDF lacked secure communication lines, which were vulnerable to enemy roadside bombs.

In contrast, in the past two decades the IDF has similarly been operating in Judea and Samaria with a relatively small number of personnel, the difference now being that its control over the area is bolstered by hundreds of thousands of Jews whose daily presence and movement supplies a “population mass.”¹¹ The only possible conclusion, therefore, is that settlement proliferation does not constitute a burden at all; properly utilized, settlements actually provide invaluable support for the larger security effort.

From a technical standpoint, permitting individual settlement communities to grow enhances the level of security across the entire settlement bloc. Cumulative experience shows that multiple purposes are served when one settlement's expansion triggers the subsequent expansion of neighboring communities. This process assures contiguity, reinforces the sense of regional solidarity and security, and greatly facilitates ongoing, routine security operations by small, mobile military units.

In psychological and perceptual terms, concrete statistical and visual evidence of settlement construction, growth and expansion directly impact enemy interpretations of our staying power, presence and determination. According to this logic, well summed-up in the Arab proverb: "*Nakhna ma'a al-hayat al waqf*" ("We are facing the strong wall"), settlement expansion signals that the Jewish State's presence in the region is strong. Hence, it becomes prudent, preferable and indeed necessary to accommodate Israel. On a personal note, I recall Sheikh Tahar Abu Salah, spiritual leader of the Druze villages in the Golan, remarking to me that he was entirely unimpressed by Prime Minister Netanyahu's declaration in the spring of 2016 that Israel's hold on the Golan was "forever." Without the Israeli settlement presence on the Golan Heights actually expanding, the Sheikh confided, he would continue to "sit on the fence," because who knows what tomorrow might bring.

The road system and its contribution to security

Today it is easy to explain networking and its significance. A. B. Yehoshua, in his 2012 play "Two Walk Together," describes three meetings in London in 1934, between the leading Zionist protagonists, Vladimir ("Zeev") Jabotinsky and David Ben-Gurion. In one session, Jabotinsky expresses his astonishment at the "Tower and Stockade" project, and asks how isolated settlements could possibly lead to a sustained Jewish presence in Palestine. The two men clearly had different perceptions regarding physical presence in open areas. Jabotinsky measured numbers and spatial continuity, whereas Ben-Gurion, with his Russian schooling, viewed open areas as a network of mutual dynamic interconnections constantly forming, evolving and re-shaping. From the very beginning of the Zionist settlement enterprise, a Jewish presence was established solely and exclusively through network connections.

Between Metulla, Rosh Pina, Yavne'el and Kfar Tabor no spatial continuity existed. Isolated settlement in a predominantly Arab region might have been easily considered folly were it not for the network of on-site managers and officials sponsored by Baron Rothschild, together with other familial and cultural ties between the townships. This spatial perception informs the logic of Jewish settlement even today, as seen in the network of panoramic vantage points ("*mitspim*") in the Galilee. Similar functions are fulfilled by the network of highways and roads connecting the Judea and Samaria settlements, ensuring that even remote communities like Shavei Shomron are incorporated within the road grid running between Alfei Menashe, Kedumim, Einav and Avnei Hefetz.

Realizing this importance of roads linking settlements, Yitzhak Rabin conditioned progress in the Oslo negotiating process on the expansion of bypasses, thereby creating an advanced network of roads in Judea and Samaria, including the Halhul bypass through tunnels to Gush Etzion, the Ramallah bypass and the main road to Ariel. The operational contribution of these arteries was illustrated during Operation Defensive Shield. Without them, the IDF would have possessed considerably less maneuverability to assemble troops and redeploy from one sector to another. Moreover, it can be argued that the settler presence and these modern access roads have

indirectly facilitated Palestinian economic development.

Cultivation of agricultural plots by the settlements merits mention as another contribution to the overall effectiveness of security operations, alongside the communications and road system. An agricultural presence helps to both enlarge and extend Israel's overall capacity for administering as well as securing the territories. Zionist thinking and planning always respected farmers and their ploughs as vital and singular tools in the struggle for independence and territorial sovereignty. This remains just as true today, whether in farming along the Gaza Strip border, in the Jordan Valley or even in the open spaces between settlements in Judea and Samaria.

By his or her presence, the Israeli farmer contributes to the never-ending struggle to prevent Palestinian activists from clandestine encroachment on State land. This ongoing, physical presence doubles the effectiveness of regular security patrols and outlying military outposts that bear the burden of defending the area and averting terrorism. This has been the very epitome of Israel's security concept from the very commencement of renewed Jewish settlement – 1881–1903 (the First *Aliyah*) and again after 1967 – in *Eretz Yisrael*, the Land of Israel.

Summary

I have sought to illustrate the various ways by which incorporating settlers as a positive if not indeed essential factor within the security equation contributes in the larger, most practical sense to national security. This conception of security has prevailed since the genesis of Zionism, and it continues to be both vital and effective. As Ben-Gurion wrote in summarizing the struggle for independence, “We have achieved victory along three paths: faith, pioneering creativity and suffering.”¹² I would argue these values continue to be no less valid – and necessary – today, and are presently personified by settlement inhabitants.

The settlements – a security liability¹³

Shaul Arieli

The territories commonly termed the West Bank (totaling 5,858 sq km) and the Gaza Strip (363 sq km) were conquered by Israel during the 1967 Six-Day War. Immediately thereafter, Israel unilaterally applied its laws to some 70 sq km in and around Jerusalem (including the eastern part of the city, about 6 sq km), a step that effectively constituted annexation and that has never been recognized by the international community, including the United States. Otherwise, nothing was done to alter the legal status of either the West Bank or the Gaza Strip.

Even so, both areas were incorporated within Israel's basket of territorial claims, resting on ideological (religious-nationalist) as well as security grounds. Both arguments were adduced to support the construction of settlements in these regions.

Initially, the security motive for the settlement enterprise figured prominently in cases brought to Israel's Supreme Court. It was advanced as justification for the confiscation and seizure of land, including privately owned Palestinian land, for the establishment of settlements, required, so it was claimed, to ensure a Jewish presence among the hostile Palestinian population and along the new borders (High Court Judgment [HCJ] 606/78). By 1979, 33 settlements had been established on the basis of that claim.

A significant change occurred, however, in 1979 when, in what became known as "the Elon Moreh decision," the Supreme Court refused to accept that "security" justified the seizure of private Palestinian land for settlement.¹⁴ This judgment revealed the security argument to be a pretext. The true purpose of the settlements was to create demographic and spatial conditions permitting the annexation of all or part of the West Bank to Israel, without damaging the Zionist vision of a democratic and Jewish state. At a minimum, the settlements were intended to preclude the establishment of a Palestinian state.

Nevertheless, the 1979 judgment did not halt the settlement enterprise. Within three weeks, the Begin government resolved to continue establishing settlements, albeit only on "state land." Moreover, the Israeli public continued to accept the validity of the security component of the two-fold argument that justified further settlement activity, which indeed gathered momentum. According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), by the end of 2016 some 400,000 Israelis resided in the Judea and Samaria District, in 126 settlements and around one hundred illegal outposts. In East Jerusalem, approximately 220,000 Israelis live in 12 neighborhoods.¹⁵

Notwithstanding the experience accumulated since 1967, at no time during the past 50 years has Israel's security establishment seriously attempted to examine the validity of the claim that the settlements in Judea and Samaria contribute to national security. More serious: in deference to the political delicacy of the issue the various defense bodies have not engaged in serious discussion of the nexus between the settlement policy in Judea and Samaria and Israel's national security in the broader context.

The present chapter seeks to fill that gap. Basic to our argument is the hypothesis that national security cannot be measured solely in terms of military power and vulnerability to threats of war and terror. It is also vital to address numerous other factors, each of which has an impact on the state's resilience, vulnerability and long-term survival. Some of the most important will be briefly itemized below.

Military and political considerations at the strategic level

Appealing to historical experience, settlement supporters claim that Israel's borders have traditionally been shaped by the deployment of Jewish settlement. They further contend that Israel needs secure borders, an obligation that requires control over the Jordan Valley and large parts of the West Bank. Settlements in these areas thus fulfill an essential security function.

Neither of these arguments stands up to examination. Even during the pre-state period, settlements did not in fact determine Israel's political borders, the alignment of which invariably reflected diplomatic decisions, wars and agreements (the case of Metulla, in the far north, was altogether exceptional). The various Palestine partition proposals submitted during the British Mandate period were only partially based on the contemporary deployment of Jewish and Arab settlement. For example, the 1947 UN Partition Plan allotted the entire Negev to the Jewish state, even though not one Jewish settlement then existed south of Beersheba. Besides, none of the partition plans were implemented. Settlements were always established in the wake of a Jewish military presence and were dismantled once the army departed. Such was the case after the 1948 War, and also when Israel withdrew from the Sinai in 1981 and disengaged from Gaza in 2005.

During the Oslo series of negotiations between Israel and the PLO, it was agreed that Jewish settlements would remain under Israeli sovereignty. However, this would apply only to settlements adjacent to the Green Line, in return for which an area of similar size within the State of Israel would be transferred to Palestinian control. Accordingly, if those agreements are ever implemented, the settlements will not increase the amount of territory that Israel controlled in 1967.

The contention that Israel must control the West Bank for security reasons is equally fallacious. The peace treaty with Jordan, the disintegration of Iraq and the civil war in Syria have removed any conventional threat to Israel from the east for the foreseeable future. The main local danger confronting Israel is terror, which is not an existential threat. That cannot be said of a ballistic missile attack by Iran – but no amount of Israeli control over the West Bank can prevent that scenario. Finally, the potential security threat posed by a future Palestinian state is addressed by a long list of provisions discussed in various negotiations. Palestine would be demilitarized and forbidden to conclude military alliances. The IDF would temporarily deploy in the Jordan Valley, and international forces will police the borders and crossings. Arrangements would be made for regional cooperation with Egypt and Jordan, for early warning stations, and for Israeli use of Palestinian airspace.

In sum: Jewish settlements in the West Bank do not increase the likelihood that a future agreement will grant Israel control over territory in the area. Furthermore, Israeli control over the West Bank is not vital for protecting Israel's security against its principal threats, current and potential. Israel has far more to gain from an agreement with the Palestinians that would permit the development of normal relations with the Arab countries and bolster the existing peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Such an agreement will also strengthen Israel's ability to confront the Iranian threat, since it will deny Iran the opportunity of exploiting the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in order to extend its influence in the Arab world.

The tactical level

Supporters of the settlements claim that an Israeli presence on the ground promotes security by serving as a type of front-line position, permitting the collection of intelligence and reducing

Israeli response times to external attacks. This argument was totally repudiated in the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when Israel hurriedly evacuated the settlements on the Golan Heights, which were impeding the IDF's conduct of the war. Likewise, along the Gaza Strip perimeter and in the West Bank, as soon as the level of violence rises, the IDF is forced to divert substantial forces to the protection of the local settlements and access roads, at the expense of fighting terror and the overall threat. Neither is it true that settlers ease the IDF's burden by assuming military functions.

For one thing, by doing so they in fact lend validity to the Palestinian claim that settlers form part of the occupation forces and accordingly constitute legitimate targets. For another, their geographical dispersion in fact enlarges the IDF's responsibilities. The deployment of isolated settlements profoundly influences the scale of security forces and resources required for their defense. The settlers constitute no more than 18% of the total population in the West Bank, and the built-up area of the settlements accounts for less than 3%. Despite this, the IDF is required to allocate forces ensuring complete control over 60% of the area (Area C). Significantly, the 2005 Gaza Disengagement reduced the scope of forces required in the area by two-thirds, and also led to a significant drop in the annual average of deaths and injuries.

Settlements as stimulants to Palestinian resistance

The Palestinians clearly consider the settlements a major obstacle to the realization of their national claim to establish an independent state. The ongoing development of the settlements leads to frustration and a sense of impotence, both exacerbated by the wedge-shaped deployment of Jewish settlements – a circumstance that impairs territorial contiguity between Palestinian communities and severs their transportation links.

The ongoing damage to Palestinian means of production, homes, property and agriculture, including the one-sided enforcement of the law against the Palestinians (see below), further fuels hostility. Moreover, the significant gulf between the economic condition of the Palestinians and of Israelis living in the West Bank also contributes to a process of alienation. Lastly, the attacks perpetrated by Jewish individuals, termed *Tag Mekhir* ("Price Tag"), including incitement to racism and physical attacks against Palestinian religious symbols, gravely offend Islamic religious sentiments.

Each of the above factors invariably provokes – possibly even encourages – a violent reaction while creating an atmosphere conducive to efforts by terror organizations to recruit support.

The negative impact on Israel's social cohesion

The profound domestic rift between supporters and opponents of settlements adds a significant layer of discord to Israeli society, seriously exacerbating disagreements over a range of associated political and ideological issues. Tension between "left" and "right" wings in the Israeli public over an agreement with Palestinians that would involve dismantlement of settlements has already on occasion assumed violent form (most traumatically in 1995, when Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated by an opponent of the Oslo accords). There are increasing signs that tempers remain high and that extremist settlers and their supporters are again prepared to resort to violence, with the expressed aim of undermining the state's democratic foundations – foundations in any case weakened by public accusations, some voiced

by leading politicians, that the Supreme Court and other state institutions are infected by a left-wing bias.

As a “people’s army,” principally composed of conscripts and reservists, the IDF is especially sensitive to such strains. Particularly is this so due to the disproportionate representation in the ranks of soldiers from a “national religious” background, many of whom are commonly believed to support the settlement enterprise on ideological grounds, and some of whom are settlement residents. Thus far, this situation has not adversely affected unit cohesion. Even during the 2005 Gaza disengagement, instances of refusals to participate in operations to dismantle settlements (a step advocated by some right-wing rabbis) were statistically insignificant. However, it would be foolish to ignore the existence of such tensions and their potential for growth.

Meanwhile, it is already apparent that the occupation, and the settlements as one of its key features, is causing cumulative damage to the fabric of Israeli society as a whole. Increasingly, individuals (particularly those from the weaker socio-economic communities) within Israel evince a tendency to copy illegal actions in the Territories: “Price Tag” attacks, the arson of mosques, vandalizing Arab property, racist pronouncements and violent attacks against Israeli peace activists who oppose Jewish criminality in the Territories.

The negative impact on Israel’s international standing

For many years, the settlements have constituted a major problem in Israel’s relations with other countries, including its closest friends. Basically, this is because of the widespread agreement in the international community (including the United States) that the settlements constitute a clear violation of international law, which prohibits the settlement of civilians in an occupied area. Israel’s program of ongoing construction blatantly flaunts that position. Its protracted occupation of the West Bank further erodes Israel’s moral standing in the international community. Severe disagreements over settlement policies make it much harder for Israel to cooperate with its allies on a range of issues where their assistance is desired, ranging from diplomatic support in international fora to the acquisition of the advanced military capabilities needed to maintain Israel’s qualitative superiority. That situation also serves the interests of hostile countries, which are able to portray Israel as a country that thwarts efforts to reach an agreement, relies on force and ignores international law.

The negative impact on law enforcement in the West Bank

Under international law, the IDF is responsible for law enforcement in the territories, but in practice those regions are controlled by the political echelon, which possesses a pronounced pro-settler agenda. IDF soldiers responsible for protecting Israeli settlers see the Palestinians as the enemy and experience difficulties in enforcing the law against settlers who harm Palestinians in various ways (e.g., seizing land, cutting down trees, stealing crops, invading property). This situation contributes to seriously undermining judicial norms. Since law enforcement is a quasi-judicial function demanding objectivity, the enforcement of the law in the West Bank equally on both Israelis and Palestinians is gravely flawed, negating the possibility of true law enforcement in the area.

A further anomaly is that Israelis in the West Bank are not tried in the military courts, as international law demands, but inside Israel, under Israeli law. Palestinians, by contrast, are tried

in military courts and by military judges who sometimes regard them as enemies. Thus, two distinct legal systems operate in the same geographical area, one for Israelis and one for Palestinians. This situation disadvantages the Palestinians and in effect places in abeyance the rule of law in the West Bank.

The economic price

Far from being self-supporting, the settlements impose multiple burdens on the Israeli taxpayer. Although relevant information is not always accessible, the general picture is clear.

Sixty percent of the settlers are employed within Israel proper. Together with security-related considerations, this obliges the Israeli government to invest billions of Shekels in building and maintaining highways, some of which (totaling several hundred kilometers) have been specifically constructed in order to bypass Arab communities.

Secondly, the violence created by the conflict requires Israel to develop extensive and expensive “protection packages” for the settlements. The settlements themselves are equipped with electronic perimeter fences, patrol routes, watchtowers, guard groups, hotlines, distress buttons, electric gates, emergency roads and so forth. On the highways, protective elements are installed on buses, and specially equipped cars are made available to accompany suppliers and service providers. In addition, Palestinian traffic is monitored by complex systems of roadblocks, checkpoints, gates and crossings.

Two other items are noteworthy. First, the Separation and Security Barrier (originally designed to prevent terrorist infiltration into Israel) was lengthened by hundreds of kilometers in order to incorporate as many settlements as possible. The construction of the barrier cost NIS 15 billion, while maintenance costs total NIS 1 billion a year.

Second: the government encourages Israelis to move to settlements by providing welfare incentives. Accordingly, the budget transferred to the Jewish local authorities in the West Bank is double that received by local authorities with a similar population inside Israel, including in underprivileged peripheral areas.

In conclusion: security requires peace between neighbors based on mutual recognition and respect for vital interests, a state of affairs that enables each side to exist, develop and prosper. A defense strategy based on fortified lines is doomed to failure – as is demonstrated by examples stretching from the Great Wall of China and the Roman limes, through the Maginot Line and the Atlantic Wall and on to the Bar-Lev Line in Sinai in the 1973 War. The connection between security and territory needs to be examined from a broad diplomatic, military and social perspective.

Thus analyzed, we conclude that the settlement enterprise does not strengthen Israel’s national security. On the contrary, it imposes a heavy price on national security, which it also places at risk. The settlements damage Israel’s international standing and social resilience; impair the rule of law in Israel; and constitute a key obstacle to progress toward a diplomatic agreement. From a national security perspective, Israel’s manifest interest is to reach an agreement in order to terminate the conflict with the Palestinians. That is the only way to create the favorable diplomatic conditions required for optimizing Israel’s development in this sensitive part of the world. Absent peace – and there can be no safe borders and no security.

Notes

- 1 The Jewish settlement enterprise in the territories occupied during the 1967 Six-Day War is widely recognized to be one of the most contentious issues in Israeli–Palestinian relations. Less commonly acknowledged is the prominence of the settlements in domestic Israeli debates over security. This chapter corrects that bias by inviting two authors, both former senior commanders in the IDF, to argue the security pros and cons of settlements. In so doing, they offer unique insights into the considerations that informed Israeli decision-making on territorial issues in the past – and that are likely to continue to do so in the future.
- 2 David Ben-Gurion, *The Reborn State of Israel*, Vol. 1 (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Am Oved Publishers, 1969, p. 291.
- 3 Dapei Elazar, Vol. 2: “Strategic Depth in Modern War,” papers presented at a symposium held at Tel-Aviv University, April 1979 (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Amikam Press and Tel Aviv University, 1981.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 46.
- 5 Barak’s views are contained in classified documents dating from his time as Chief of Staff, 1991–1995.
- 6 Prime Minister’s announcement to the Knesset on the ratification of the Israel-PLO agreement, October 5, 1995. Records of the 13th Knesset, 376th session.
- 7 Introduction by Yigal Allon, to Dov Knohl, *Gush Etzion in War* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Zionist Federation, 1957.
- 8 Israel Baer, *Israel’s Security: Yesterday, Today Tomorrow* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Amikam, 1966, pp. 241–242. Baer wrote this book while serving a sentence for spying on behalf of the USSR.
- 9 The film *Dunkirk* (2017) vividly portrays how, in the face of the military system’s collapse, volunteer citizens in thousands of small boats successfully rescued over 300,000 British soldiers besieged in Dunkirk in 1940.
- 10 Interestingly, Ben-Gurion and the pioneering labor parties did not accept the liberal position, implying that something has indeed changed. Until a few decades ago, the workers’ parties stood for the militarily mobilized society, but now represent instead civilian, bourgeois society.
- 11 The IDF currently fields less than 10,000 combatants in Judea and Samaria. In comparison, over 100,000 soldiers and police were deployed in order to secure the 2016 Euro soccer finals in France.
- 12 David Ben-Gurion, “Introduction,” in: *History of the War of Independence* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Maarachot, 1959, p. 39.
- 13 This chapter is based in part on research conducted by a team of the Council for Peace and Security, of which the author was a key member.
- 14 *Dawikat v. The Government of Israel*. Israel High Court of Justice file number HCJ 390/79, issued in 1979 and published in *Piskei Din* (Hebrew: ‘Judgments’). Jerusalem: Nevo 1979 34/1:1.
- 15 Statistics indicate that, notwithstanding enormous investments, the settlement enterprise is in a process of decline. The 17 settlements established in the Gaza Strip were evacuated in 2005. In the West Bank, other than in specific “blocs” covering just 4–5 percent of the area, the Arab population has maintained its demographic and spatial dominance. CBS figures show that over the past 20 years, the annual Jewish growth rate in the Judea and Samaria District has fallen from 10.2 percent (1995) to 3.4 percent (2016), less than a quarter of which is due to migration. The remainder was caused by natural growth, half of which was contributed by the two *haredi* cities in the West Bank: Modi’in Illit and Beitar Illit, which are not identified with the settlement enterprise as such. A quarter of the settlements show negative migration.

7

Keeping faith

Religious Jewish perspectives on Israeli security

Aharon Kampinsky

Never in Zionist history has there existed a homogenous Jewish religious attitude to the multitude of issues associated with Israel's national security. Rather, the prevalent picture has always been one of intra-religious dissent. For many years, controversies focused on issues that reflected basic differences of outlook between segments of Jewish religious Israeli society generically labeled "ultra-orthodox" (in Hebrew *haredi*) and "national-religious" (*dati leumi*). Recent decades, however, have witnessed a supplementary development. Ideological and sociological transformations have splintered "national-religious" society, creating internal cleavages on national security issues.

The purpose of this chapter is to trace these processes by first outlining the origins of dissension over national security within Israeli religious society-at-large. Extensive attention then focuses on three security-related issues generating particularly intense controversy in recent decades.

"National-religious" versus "haredi" perspectives on Israeli security

Israel's *haredi* Jewish communities, who now comprise almost 12% of the country's Jewish population, have always projected themselves as the guardians of Judaism's traditional norms and beliefs. (Their designation derives from Isaiah 66:5: "Hear the world of the Lord, you who tremble [*ha-haredim*] at His word."). As far as matters of national security are concerned, the inference has been unmistakable. Israel's survival cannot be measured solely in physical terms and hence does not depend on conventional, physical attributes of power. *Jewish* security is, at root, a meta-physical state, and one that can only be attained and assured by Divine protection. Indeed, to resort to the use of physical force without the Almighty's explicit authorization is tantamount to sinfulness, since it demonstrates an absence of faith in God's promise to uphold His everlasting covenant with His people.

Of all the ancient rabbinic teachings cited in support of that position, undoubtedly the most influential and relevant is contained in folio 112 of tractate *Ketubot* of the Babylonian Talmud,

the authoritative storehouse of Jewish teachings and legal decisions redacted in the fifth century CE. According to this source, at a formative stage of its history the Jewish people undertook three oaths. Not to “ascend the wall” (i.e., resort to force to regain control over the Holy Land). Not to precipitate the End of Days (i.e., to await God’s deliverance). And not to rebel against the nations (i.e., to submit to the conditions of Exile until the coming of the true Messiah).¹

As burnished by successive generations of scholars, the notion of “The Three Oaths” certainly constituted a standing – and binding – renunciation of bellicosity. Nevertheless, it did not mandate an attitude of absolute passivity. On the contrary, the corollary of the “three oaths” was a belief that the only this-worldly activity Jews should be fully engaged was the study of the *Torah* – the body of laws that God bestowed on Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai. Over the long haul of history, so the argument insisted, exegesis of that Holy Text had been responsible for Jewish survival. So, too, in the future, would study of both the Scriptures and rabbinic writings constitute Israel’s life-line – to physical security on earth as to spiritual salvation in heaven.

Repeated and embellished in literally thousands of later rabbinic texts, those teachings assumed unprecedented practical importance with the advent of political Zionism in the late nineteenth century. In this respect, Herzl’s ultra-orthodox critics evinced more prescience than did the founder of the Zionist Organization. Displaying unbounded (and unwarranted) optimism, Herzl believed that the program he sketched in *Der Judenstaat* could be implemented without resort to force. Many rabbis were far more skeptical – and became increasingly so with the formation of a Jewish self-defense framework (the *Haganah*) in mandatory Palestine. By the eve of the Holocaust, ultra-Orthodoxy’s opposition to the call to arms – considered by its leaders to be inherent in Zionism – had hardened, with the “three oaths” its mantra-like justification.²

Recent research demonstrates that *haredi* reluctance to invest the term “security” with physical meaning was not as intransigent as later Zionist mythology suggested. In the years 1945–1948, when the Jewish population of mandatory Palestine confronted a manifest and tangible threat to its survival (and with the trauma of the Holocaust still very fresh), the leaders of the *haredi* segment of the *Yishuv* (local Jewish community) unhesitatingly encouraged their male youth to enlist in Jewish defense frameworks, an action they justified by reference to the religious commandment mandating any action to avert a life-threatening situation.³ Moreover, when the issue of enlistment came up in the course of negotiations religious leaders conducted with David Ben-Gurion immediately prior to the establishment of the State, *haredi* demands were rather modest. All their representatives asked for was a guarantee of draft deferments for just 400 *haredi* males testifying “[the study of] Torah is their profession.”

It has been posited that Ben-Gurion agreed to this infringement on the rule of universal conscription, whose application he was otherwise insistent upon, because he estimated the *haredi* world in any case was fading and that the number of full-time scholars seeking draft-exemptions would soon decrease.⁴ If so, he seriously miscalculated. Even before the ink dried on the agreement, *haredi* leaders had determined on a massive expansion of its terms. Specifically, they formulated a program transforming all *haredi* society into a community of scholars (*hevrat lomdim*), an enclave whose entire male population would devote itself exclusively to the study of the sacred texts. Military service, in any form, would necessarily distract from that end, and hence had to be avoided at all costs.

The most articulate exponent of that position was Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karelitz (1878–1953), better known in the world of rabbinic letters as the *Hazon Ish*, the title of his first book), a scholar and spiritual mentor whose towering status was renowned throughout post-Holocaust

Jewish orthodoxy.⁵ Born in Lithuania, where he was a famed child prodigy, Karelitz emigrated to mandatory Palestine in 1933 and thereafter led an almost monastic life, declining all offers of public office. Eschewing contact with the secular world soon became a model for all *haredi* behavior, adding yet another justification (in *haredi* eyes) for non-enlistment. The spiritual well-being of even the most devout of young *haredi* males was liable to be endangered by their exposure to the secular world while on military service – a risk far too serious to take. The location best suited to pursuing the *haredi* vocation is the *yeshiva* (translated as “seat [of learning]”). As Karelitz pointed out, academies of that name have served as crucibles of socialization and indoctrination for almost two millennia, and the primary mission of the *haredi* world in the present age is to ensure that tradition’s enhancement and continued growth.

Subsequent *haredi* leaders echoed those sentiments and expressed them with increasing emphasis once political parties representing the *haredi* constituency became essential components of one or another of the fragile coalitions by which Israel has invariably been governed since 1977. Extensions of *haredi* draft deferments thereafter became a rule of political life, so that the numbers of those benefiting from that pre-state concession increased by leaps and bounds, reaching 16,000 in 1985, 30,000 in 1999 and almost 60,000 in 2017 (equivalent to some 13% of the total male potential recruitment).⁶

Under pressure from Israel’s Supreme Court, which first expressed dissatisfaction in 1996 with so massive an infringement of the rule of universal conscription, efforts have been made to moderate this trend. On the one hand, the IDF now has the budget required to establish and expand special service tracks for *haredi* males, purposely designed to reduce their exposure to influences that might endanger their life-styles. Simultaneously, some *haredi* leaders have been persuaded to agree to a small “quota” of young ultra-Orthodox men being recruited who may not be suited to full-time study.⁷ Neither of these moves has affected the overall picture, however. Moreover, the annual intake of *haredi* conscripts persistently falls short of the expected “quotas,” and efforts at passing legislation, imposing sanctions on draft-dodgers as required by the Supreme Court, have repeatedly been stymied by the exigencies of coalition politics.

Most significantly of all, *haredi* society as a whole gives no indication whatsoever of being prepared to revise its fundamental opposition to military service as a sinful betrayal of trust in Divine protection. In this respect, ultra-Orthodoxy remains intransigently faithful to the teachings of Rabbi Karelitz. Students of the Torah are the true “Guardians of the City” (*Neturei Karta*), since it is they who bear principal responsibility for the nation’s spiritual welfare. By comparison, all conventional means of protection and safety are irrelevant. In one late twentieth-century formulation: “Other than the *Torah* we have no security, neither soldiers nor the IDF will help us.”⁸

National–religious Zionist concepts of security

Whereas *haredi* communities thus envision traditional Jewish scholarship as the sole guarantee of Israel’s survival, the national–religious segment of Israeli society (which comprises roughly 12–15% of the overall Jewish population) proposes a far more complex interpretation of the term “security.” While sharing ultra-Orthodoxy’s belief in the transcendental importance of *Torah* study, it nevertheless disputes the reductive two-fold *haredi* argument that the scholarly vocation renders redundant any other means of self-help and study must be segregated from mundane pursuits. On the contrary, and as its hyphenated nomenclature indicates, central to the national–

religious ethic is the belief that orthodox Jews must fully participate in the physical re-constitution of Jewish independence in the Holy Land. Indeed, only by doing so can they become partners in the Almighty's design to fulfill His people's messianic aspirations. It follows, therefore, that for religious Zionists integration in the task of national reconstruction is a holy calling. By extension, service in the IDF, the military institution expressly founded in order to defend the state from attack, constitutes a religious *obligation*.

Statistics reflect the impact of these teachings. Annual IDF reports on "motivation to service"⁹ indicate that, overall, an increasing proportion of secular Israeli youth evince growing reluctance to serve in IDF field combat units, much preferring the more comfortable (and safer) ambience of support formations. Likewise decreasing is the proportion of young men and women from secular bourgeois backgrounds prepared to follow up their periods of conscript service by two further years of paid service as junior officers. In sharp contrast, ever since the mid-1980s, graduates of national-religious high schools have served in disproportionately high numbers in combat units (especially infantry and armor brigades) and are now estimated to comprise as much as a quarter of the total complement of junior officers.¹⁰

While indications are that the trajectory of male national-religious service patterns may be leveling off, this is certainly not the case where women are concerned. On the contrary, in this respect an even more remarkable revolution is underway. Female service in the IDF, despite very much frowned upon by mainstream national-religious rabbinic leadership, is fast becoming a norm. The numbers of women enlisting from this sector doubled between 2010 and 2015, the latest date for which full figures are available), encompassing over a third of all national-religious female high-school graduates.¹¹

The intellectual origins of religious Zionism's affirmative attitude towards military service also pre-date the establishment of the State of Israel. At a theoretical level, most of the foundational theses were propounded during the first half of the twentieth century by a distinguished gallery of thinkers who argued the theological legitimacy of reinterpreting the tradition of the "Three Oaths." Especially prominent in this school were Rabbi Isaac Jacob Reines (1839–1915), who institutionalized religious Zionism by founding the "Mizrachi" branch of the Zionist Organization; and Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), the new movement's most influential ideologue, and in 1921 appointed the first Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi of the *Yishuv*.

True, both personalities wholeheartedly subscribed to traditional Jewish opposition to militarism. During World War I, each pointedly contrasted the Jews' adherence to the "culture of the Book" with the "culture of the sword" displayed by gentiles.¹² Nevertheless, both broke new ground when recognizing that, as a last resort, Jews too might need to use force in order to ensure their security in the Holy Land. Fired with absolute conviction that contemporary Jewry was living out the "end of days" foretold in biblical prophecy, Kook was an especially eloquent advocate of the radical steps required to advance that end, insisting

Our return will only succeed if it will be marked, along with its spiritual glory, by a physical return which will create ... a fiery spirit encased in powerful muscles.¹³

For all their potentially explosive implications, Rabbi Kook's teachings exercised only a marginal influence on national-religious attitudes towards security issues during the first two decades of modern Israel's history. Although, in retrospect, scholars have been able to identify and reconstruct distinct currents of "activist" militancy and aggressive messianism in religious Zionism during that early period,¹⁴ at the time they were submerged beneath a prevailing climate

of national–religious pragmatism on security affairs. More militant inferences only began to surface in the mid-1960s, under the influence of two independent processes. The first was the rise to prominence of Rabbi Kook’s son, Rabbi Zvi Yehudah Kook (1891–1982), who succeeded his father as principal of the academy in Jerusalem that bore the family name and undertook the vast project of publishing and interpreting his father’s voluminous writings. The second, and far more dramatic, was the Six-Day War of 1967, whose seemingly miraculous results, the younger Kook informed his disciples, could only be understood when placed in the context supplied by his father’s apocalyptic framework. The troops responsible for liberating east Jerusalem, Hebron and Shechem (Nablus) – cities that embrace the very cradle of the nation’s ancient homeland and house many of its most sacred shrines – had marched to a rhythm dictated by the footsteps of the Messiah. Hence, to describe victory as a spectacular temporal feat of martial arms would be to mistake its true meaning. The achievement was celestial – brought about by the hand of God.¹⁵

These themes became even more pronounced in the wake of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when the nationwide sense of relief generated by Israel’s remarkable military recovery was supplemented, in the national–religious community, by a fear that “the wheels of the chariot of redemption” might be grinding to a halt.¹⁶ If further such near-disasters were to be averted, a concerted program of security-related action was urgently required. One necessary step – spearheaded by an extra-parliamentary pressure group called *Gush Emunim* (“Bloc of the Faithful”) – was the initiation of a massive expansion of Jewish settlement in Judea and Samaria, expressly designed to ensure the retention of those territories under Jewish sovereignty. A second was the establishment of a network of “arrangement academies” (*yeshivot hesder*), offering prospective male national–religious recruits to the IDF the opportunity to combine military service with extended period of advanced *Torah* study.

Both enterprises invested the term “security” with revolutionary Jewish meaning. Land and defense, two spheres whose importance secularists had approached in entirely instrumental terms, were in most new versions of religious Zionist thinking now injected with elements of messianic dynamism. Thus inspired, many of the community’s younger generation expressed increasing impatience with the “defensive” attitudes adopted by their political representatives towards security issues. Advocating a new “activist” posture, some attempted to overthrow the older leadership of the national–religious political party (*Mafdal*); others established new right-wing electoral tickets; and yet a third group went to the extreme of forming themselves into a militant “underground,” whose members targeted Palestinian targets and personalities.

Sensitive to the dangers of such developments, several national–religious thinkers pleaded for a more restrained approach. They argued that the path to true security lay in accommodation with the Palestinians, not their subjection, and least of all their forcible expulsion. Prominent among the proponents of that school of thought was Yeshayahu Leibowitz (1903–1994), a professor of organic chemistry at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, a practicing Orthodox Jew and a respected philosopher who long before 1967 had expressed public criticism of Israeli militarism. Already in 1953, he accused the IDF of betraying Jewish traditional values by retaliatory actions indiscriminately targeting Palestinian civilians. After 1967, his tone became more strident. *Gush Emunim*, he warned, was turning the settlements into a Golden Calf. Retention of the territories was breeding a generation of “Judeo-Nazis.” Security required Israel cease ruling over Palestinians.¹⁷ Those sentiments, albeit not necessarily their formulation, struck a chord with members of the small but nevertheless not insignificant moderate wing of national–religious thought. Adherents of this school also established pressure groups allied with the left wing of Israel’s political spectrum, and for a short time maintained an independent party (*Meimad*),

whose leader, Rabbi Yehudah Amital, gained election to Israel's parliament.

Areas of disagreement

These debates produced bifurcate effects. In strictly political terms, they proved wasteful. They split the national–religious constituency that since the 1980s has regularly splintered into rival factions, some of which have failed to meet the threshold required for parliamentary representation. In areas of specifically military-related concern, by contrast, the torrent of energies released by the unprecedented national–religious focus on defense and security issues produced two major breakthroughs – one intellectual and the other organizational.

The intellectual breakthrough finds expression in numerous studies by national–religious spiritual leaders devoted to: (a) analyses of the theological dimensions of Israel's wars, and (b) classifying rules of behavior for orthodox soldiers on active service. At an early stage of enquiry, focus tended to concentrate on narrowly defined ritual matters, the most prominent relating to Sabbath observance and dietary laws. In time, however, the scope of research and commentary has greatly expanded until it now incorporates subjects ranging from behavior vis-à-vis Palestinian noncombatants to depiction of Israel's wars as a religious imperative (*milchemet mitzva*).

The enormity of this undertaking cannot be exaggerated. For over two millennia rabbinic authorities had entirely – and deliberately – eschewed the sort of in-depth enquiries into the *ius in bello* and *ius ad bellum* that were staples of moral discourse in the Christian world. Ever since 1948, national–religious rabbis, an increasing number of whom since the 1980s possess personal combat experience, evince their determination to repair longstanding lacunae. Displaying considerable intellectual ingenuity, they continue to scrutinize every conceivable aspect of military life through the prism of traditional observances. Thanks to their labors there now exists a massive new corpus of rabbinic writings, in both printed and electronic form, generically referred to as *dinei tzava u- milchama* (laws relating to the army and war). These writings are studied as much for the practical quotidian instruction they contain as for the ideological and moral guidance they impart.¹⁸

Equally impressive – and related – has been the organizational breakthrough achieved thanks to the new release of national–religious energies. This takes the form of several frameworks presently offering graduates of national–religious high schools the opportunity to combine their conscript terms of military service with attendance at academies, many specializing in the authoring and study of texts devoted to *dinei tzava u-milchama*. As already noted, a prototype “arrangement” *yeshiva* was first established already in 1964, whereas by 2016 there were 65 such institutions with a combined annual intake of over 1,600 students.

Even more precipitous is the growth of another program, provided by “pre-conscription Torah colleges” [*mechinot*], whose numbers have mushroomed from just one in 1988, with just 20 students, to over 30 in 2016, with 1,800 students. (In response to recent conscription trends, a small number of similar establishments now exist for girls, too). Approximately half of all national–religious males of conscript age now enlist in one or another of these programs, explicitly designed to raise their pupils' awareness of the importance of military service as well as *Torah* study for Israel's security. It is to the distinct sense of mission – altogether different from both the *haredi* and secular outlooks – that many observers attribute both the high level of combat motivation displayed by graduates of these programs and, more tragically, to their

prominence in IDF casualty lists since the 1980s.¹⁹

Reactions to these developments have been mixed. Mainstream Israeli society has generally welcomed the growing prominence of national–religious troops in combat units and expressed appreciation for the patriotic devotion that they display. The Israel Prize, the country’s most prestigious award for public service, was awarded to the *yeshivot hesder* program in 1991 and to Rabbi Eli Sedan, initiator of the *mechina* program, in 2006. In senior echelons of the IDF, praise has been yet more effusive. Chiefs of Staff regularly accede to invitations to visit *yeshivot hesder* and *mechina* institutions, where they express undiluted admiration for their contributions to supplying the IDF with cadres of high-quality personnel.

Conversely, other senior officers publicly caution that the increase in rabbinic influence over so large a segment of the IDFs complement could undermine the military chain of command. Some civilian observers have been more explicit, cautioning that teachings imparted by national–religious spiritual guides pose a fundamental threat to the principle of exclusive governmental control over troop loyalties, and hence endanger the security of the State.

These warnings became especially strident in the wake of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin’s assassination in November 1995, by a one-time *hesder* graduate. Not least after the assailant claimed at his trial to have acted under the inspiration of a rabbinically sanctioned religious commitment to the “greater Land of Israel,” whose integrity he believed threatened by Rabin’s concessions to the Palestinians in the recent Oslo accords. Not surprisingly, for several years thereafter the left-wing press in Israel regularly published unabashedly alarmist prophecies foretelling the imminence of rebellion on the part of national–religious conscripts and demanding they be carefully screened before being entrusted with positions of command.

A more balanced evaluation – and therefore the more persuasive – is posited by Professor Yagil Levy, an Israeli military sociologist of international repute, in whose view the increasing prominence of national–religious personnel in the IDF (now evident at senior command levels) is fueling “theocratization” of the Israeli military.²⁰ What began as, in his view, a concerted effort on the part of the national–religious leadership (political and spiritual) to craft institutional arrangements that would facilitate an influx of national–religious troops into the ranks has resulted, so he believes, in the creation of a “critical mass” of such soldiers in combat units.

This development, in turn, has had three derivative effects. First, by restricting the IDF command’s intra-organizational autonomy, compelling it to submit to rabbinic determinations of permissible standards in such matters as the formation of mixed-gender units. Second, by circumscribing the IDF command’s freedom to deploy national–religious troops on operational missions liable to arouse rabbinic opposition. Third, and most serious, by permitting adherence to rabbinic teachings on the “holiness” of their combat role by soldiers lends to IDF operations, especially against the Palestinians, the character of a religiously motivated crusade, which, by its militancy, threatens to negate rational control over decision-making.

Much of the strength of Levy’s analysis – but also its principal weakness – rests on the internal consistency of the evidence. His projection of the evolution of the IDF’s movement in the direction of religiosity is so linear and tidy it threatens to distort the very history it seeks to reconstruct. Particularly is this so where reactions are concerned. Closer examination of the relevant internal discourse within the national–religious community to the processes he describes reveals considerably more debate than Levy seems prepared to acknowledge. Hence, also a far less homogenous or pre-determined program of “theocratization” than his analysis admits. In fact, national–religious understandings of how belief might be harnessed to benefit Israel’s security are now disputed more passionately than ever before.

Three questions illustrate these divisions. How should national–religious troops respond if ordered to dismantle Jewish settlements in the disputed territories? How might they best reconcile their life-styles with the current IDF drive towards gender integration? To what extent are these soldiers entitled to assume the role of warriors whose mission is to fight in the name of God and against His assumed enemies? The debates generated by each of these topics warrant independent analysis.

“The Promised Land”

Virtually without exception, national–religious rabbis originally expressed wholehearted support for *Gush Emunim*’s settlement program, which they invested with the sanctity of a religious mission. Each settlement contributed to Redemption of the Holy Land, territory belonging to Israel by Divine right. These teachings were transmitted to successive generations of national–religious youth, not least in the *hesder* and *mechina* institutions, many of which were deliberately constructed adjacent to Jewish settlements in Judea, Samaria and the Gaza Strip.

In 1982, concern first arose that national–religious soldiers exposed to such teachings might refuse orders to dismantle settlements, when, in compliance with the Camp David accords negotiated with Egypt, the Begin Government ordered the IDF to evacuate the Jewish township of Yamit in the Sinai peninsula. This concern resurfaced in 1993, when in response to the Oslo accords, several leading national–religious spiritual authorities (including a former IDF Chief Rabbi) published a “manifesto” explicitly instructing national–religious soldiers in advance to disobey any orders to surrender Jewish-occupied property to Palestinian control.²¹ Tensions ratcheted up still further in 2005, this time when the Sharon Government announced its determination to implement Israel’s “disengagement” from the Gaza Strip and a small portion of northern Samaria, an operation necessitating the forcible removal of several thousand Jewish settlers. Once again, several rabbis publicly castigated all orders to participate in the withdrawal operation as inherently sinful.²²

Much more lay behind incitement to insubordination than an attempt at asserting the primacy of rabbinic authority over military commands. At issue was a far more fundamental disagreement over the conditions required to ensure Israel’s security.

For rabbinic opponents of settlement dismantlement, this was nothing less than a transgression upon a cardinal article of faith. In the words of the above-mentioned “manifesto” first addressed to troops in 1993 and widely re-distributed 12 years later (above n. 21): “it is forbidden to obey a military order which contradicts the commandment of settling the Land of Israel, which is equivalent to all the commands of the *Torah*.” Conversely, those religious authorities expressing strongest opposition to troop disobedience adopted an entirely different security-related prism. As Inbari demonstrates, even those most ideologically supportive of the settlement program in general (as the majority undoubtedly were) argued that their commitment to the State and to its unity was even greater. Troop disobedience had to be condemned lest it undermine the entire notion of state sovereignty, thereby endangering the very foundations upon which the continued existence of Israel’s independence ultimately depended. As one influential principal of a *hesder* academy wrote:

It is obligatory to obey military orders, even though the Land of Israel is our land, every inch of which it is a religious and Zionist duty to settle. It is obligatory to obey military orders, even if they mean destroying our own house or that of our kinsfolk. It is an

obligation to do so because that is the backbone of our common existence. Any other course involves tearing society to shreds. It is an obligation to do so because a country in which there is no norm of orderly government and obedience to commands is in danger of extinction.²³

How much this latter argument influenced national–religious troop behavior cannot be assessed with any degree of accuracy. All that we do know is that, in the event, the number of national troops who disobeyed orders to participate in the disengagement operation was so small as to be statistically insignificant. Nevertheless, given other factors that might explain why this was so,²⁴ the importance of debate itself should not be dismissed. Neither should the debate be considered closed.

“And thy camp shall be holy” (Deuteronomy 23:15)

Classic Jewish sources have long been aware of the need to take special care to counter the corrosive effect military life and routine threaten to exert on morals and a soldier’s individual behavior.²⁵ Indeed, much of the contemporary corpus of rabbinic instructions on soldierly conduct (referred to above) is written with these considerations in mind: consequently, the emphasis on the need to ensure soldiers not only observe specific ritual requirements but comport themselves at all times in a manner altogether consonant with traditional Jewish norms.

Lurking behind all such teachings is the fear that national–religious conscripts are highly vulnerable to secularization, particularly where gender relationships are concerned, an area in which national–religious society has always taken care to ensure that barriers laid down by traditional Judaism be strictly maintained. Most institutions of national–religious secondary education are single-sex; even in the most popular of national–religious youth movements (*Bnei Akiva*), contact between boys and girls is strictly monitored.

For many years, there was no reason to suspect that enlistment in the IDF might expose young national–religious male conscripts to a different environment, especially if they served in combat units. After all, the vast majority of women drafted into service served in clerical positions and lived off base. Their presence in combat units, even in ancillary support capacities, was generally circumscribed. Since the 1990s, however, this is no longer the case. Partly in response to pressure from feminist groups and the Supreme Court, and partly owing to recognition by the IDF General Staff that young women can contribute to the overall military effort in a wide range of postings (including combat postings), the IDF has increasingly sought to integrate female conscripts into all units and branches of service. Women now serve, albeit still in small numbers, as pilots of fighter jets, as tank commanders and as front-line infantry combatants. Many more come into constant contact with their male counterparts as operators of sophisticated intelligence hardware and as small-arms instructors.²⁶

How to cope with that situation, which in rabbinic opinion is fraught with the danger of sexual license, is now one of the highest items on the national–religious agenda. Here too, responses have been far from unanimous. One school of thought has attacked the IDF’s entire program of gender integration, castigating it as indicative of Israeli society’s general descent into moral depravity through a process carrying with it the threat of national decay and destruction. In moments of extreme despair, other exponents of this view even warn they cannot possibly educate their students to enlist in an army so blatantly undermining traditional Jewish gender

practices, thereby violating the Biblical command that “thy camp shall be holy.” Hence, they threaten to encourage their pupils to avoid conscription altogether.²⁷ Others adopt a more pragmatic approach, entering into negotiations with the military establishment in order to map out a *modus vivendi* aimed at reducing inappropriate behavior resulting from the increased likelihood of inter-gender contact.

Over time, two institutional solutions have emerged. One is an expansion in the number of all-male units comprised of religious youth requesting assignment to an infantry brigade. Although originally intended for limited numbers of *haredi* youth volunteering for service, an increasing proportion are national-religious conscripts professing to follow a particularly stringent lifestyle in matters of all religious observance, including gender issues. The other institutional solution, first adopted in 2002, is promulgation of General Staff Order 33.0207, which mandates single-sex dormitory and lavatory arrangements throughout the IDF, and which establishes guidelines of “appropriate integration” in integrated mixed-gender battalions.

Far from putting an end to debate, the “appropriate integration” document has only fueled further dissension. Despite an IDF administrative framework tasked with ensuring its provisions be implemented properly, complaints of enforcement lapses have multiplied. Making matters worse, just as feminists claim the Order discriminates against women, many rabbis argue it “is not ‘appropriate’ at all and does not meet the criteria of Jewish law (*halacha*).”²⁸ The notable increase in national-religious young women now enlisting adds another dimension to this discourse. Even rabbis giving this trend their blessing (and most emphatically do not) acknowledge present gender arrangements inadequate.

A working consensus has proven impossible to attain. Although a delegation of rabbis did manage to persuade the Chief of Staff to join them in conducting a review of the “appropriate integration” order in the summer of 2017, they failed to present him with an alternative formulation to which they themselves all agreed. The original document (apart from some peripheral amendments) remained in place when the meeting ended.

Meanwhile, as in the case of settlement dismantlement, national-religious youngsters appear to be adopting a wait-and-see attitude. Few have refused to serve in mixed-gender units, and only a handful has protested against the “immodesty” displayed by female entertainers at IDF ceremonies.²⁹ Nevertheless, the topic remains potentially explosive.

A priest anointed for war?

Observers of the IDF Chief Rabbinate argue that in recent years it has embarked on a radically new departure. Once concerned primarily with the provision of ritual needs and services for religiously observant troops, it now places far greater emphasis on “outreach” programs designed to transmit traditional Jewish teachings and beliefs to servicemen and women from non-observant backgrounds.³⁰ This is the third of the security-related issues generating intra-religious debate in the present decade; being the most recent, it has yet to reach full development.

This issue first arose shortly after the end of the disengagement operation, upon Brigadier-General Avichai Rontzki (1951–2018), a former paratroop commander, being appointed IDF Chief Rabbi (a post he held 2006–2010). Unlike his immediate predecessors, Rontzki felt it was his duty to ensure the chaplaincy became an integral part of the IDF’s operational framework. To that end, he declared himself assuming roles the Bible ascribed to the priestly caste (Deuteronomy 20:3–4), the most significant being the promotion of troop morale. Combat troops about to go into battle prior to IDF operations in the Gaza Strip in 2008 accordingly received

particularly heavy doses of religious “reinforcement.” According to one account:

the rabbinate brought in a lot of booklets and articles and their message was very clear: “We are the Jewish people, we came to this land by a miracle, God brought us back to this land and now we need to fight to expel the non-Jews who are interfering with our conquest of this holy land.” This was the main message, and the whole sense many soldiers had in this operation was of a religious war.³¹

As might be expected, secularists decried this type of indoctrination, with similar evidence uncovered during the next round of fighting in 2014.³² Of greater interest, however, religious observers also criticized this message, especially when they felt the IDF Chief Rabbi had overstepped the bounds of religious propriety by violating the Sabbath in order to visit soldiers. At stake, once again, was a matter of theological hierarchy. Which religious commandment took precedence: Sabbath observance? Or the assumed need to strengthen the faith of troops called upon to place their lives at risk in Israel’s physical defense? ³³ To date, neither has this dilemma ever been resolved. Nor is it at all clear whether a more “activist” IDF rabbinate in fact contributes to Israel’s security since in alienating secular troops who recoil from its supposedly apocalyptic messages it may actually cause dissension in the ranks.³⁴

The road ahead

The argument made here is that none of the internal disputes within religious Zionism over the security-related issues discussed above are compartmentalized. Rather, they are symptomatic of the wider problem that now troubles this community as it seeks to formulate an understanding of the term “security,” one capable of reconciling theological traditions with contemporary realities. Unlike the *haredim*, religious Zionists cannot absolve themselves of responsibility for the *physical* welfare of the Jewish state and its inhabitants. Yet neither can they relinquish their commitment to the preservation of its spiritual well-being. Instead, they must continue searching for ways to shoulder both missions. Since this quest is without precedent in the past two millennia of Jewish history it will, of necessity, involve a prolonged process of trial, error and almost endless disputation.

Notes

- 1 The vast literature on this subject is best summarized in English in: Aviezer Ravitzky, “‘Forcing the End’: Radical Anti-Zionism,” in: his *Messianism, Zionism and Jewish Religious Radicalism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 40–47.
- 2 “The Impact of the Three Oaths in Jewish History,” *ibid.*, pp. 211–234.
- 3 Moshe Ehrenvald, *The Haredim During the War of Independence* (Hebrew). Ben-Shemen: Modan, 2017, pp. 223–257.
- 4 Daphne Barak-Erez, “The Drafting of Yeshiva Students: From Compromise to Controversy,” in: Dvora Hacohen and Moshe Lissak (eds.) *Crossroads of Decisions in Israel* (Hebrew). Beer Sheva: Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, 2010, pp. 13–39.
- 5 Benjamin Brown, *The Hazon Ish – The Halachist, the True Believer and the Leader of the Haredi Revolution* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Magnes, 2011.
- 6 Israel Democracy Institute, *Jerusalem, 2017 Statistical Report on Ultra-Orthodox Society in Israel*, December 31, 2017. <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/20439>.
- 7 Stuart A. Cohen, “Israel,” in: Ron Hassner (ed.) *Religion in the Military Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 2014, pp. 119–121.

- 8 Nurit Stadler, *Yeshiva Fundamentalism: Piety, Gender and Resistance in the Ultra-Orthodox World*. New York: New York University Press, 2009, pp. 35–51 (citation at p. 41).
- 9 The latest available, at time of writing, published in December 2017 is summarized (Hebrew). <https://news.walla.co.il/item/3116425>.
- 10 Stuart A. Cohen, *Divine Service? Judaism and Israel's Armed Forces*. London: Routledge, 2016, pp. 7–9.
- 11 “Report by Knesset Information and Research Center,” May 22, 2017 (Hebrew). www.knesset.gov.il/mmm/data/pdf/m03962.pdf.
Personal observation indicates that the numbers are now (2018) considerably larger.
- 12 Eli Holzer, “The Use of Military Force in the Religious Zionist Ideology of R. Reines and His Successors,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry* 18 (2002): 74–94; Yehudah Mirsky, *Rav Kook: Mystic in a Time of Revolution*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014, pp. 124–128.
- 13 Abraham Isaac Kook, *Lights of Rebirth* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1993, p. 80.
- 14 Dror Greenblum, *From the Bravery of the Spirit to the Sanctification of Power: Power and Bravery in Religious Zionism 1948–1967* (Hebrew). Ra’anana: The Open University, 2016.
- 15 Avi Sagi and Dov Schwartz, *From Realism to Messianism: Religious Zionism and the Six Days’ War* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Carmel, 2017.
- 16 Ravitzky, “‘Forcing the End’: Radical Anti-Zionism,” pp. 79–144.
- 17 E.g., Yeshayahu Leibowitz, *Judaism, Human Values, and the Jewish State*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, especially pp. 223–249.
- 18 In addition to Cohen, *Divine Service?*, see also: Robert Eisen, *Religious Zionism, Jewish Law, and the Morality of War: How Five Rabbis Confronted One of Modern Judaism’s Greatest Challenges*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- 19 Elisheva Rosman-Stollman, *For God and Country? Religious Student–Soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2014.
- 20 Yagil Levy, “The Theocratization of the Israeli Military,” *Armed Forces & Society* 40 (2014): 269–94. The thesis is developed more fully in his book of the same title published in Hebrew in 2016.
- 21 Rabbi Shlomo Goren, “Disobedience to an Order” (Hebrew), *Bulletin of the Council of Rabbis of Judea and Samaria*, December 14, 1993, p. 1.
- 22 For an exhaustive treatment: Motti Inbari, *Messianic Religious Zionism Confronts Territorial Compromise*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- 23 Rabbi Yuval Cherlow, *Disengagement Responsa* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Miskal, 2010, p. 108.
- 24 Compare: Stuart A. Cohen, “Tensions Between Military Service and Religion: Real and Imagined,” *Israel Studies* 12 (2007): 103–26 and Yagil Levy, “The Embedded Military: Why Did the IDF Perform Effectively in Executing the Disengagement Plan?,” *Security Studies* 16 (2007): 382–408.
- 25 See, e.g., commentary by R. Moshe ben Nachman, 1194–1270, a renowned medieval Spanish–Jewish exegete: “Even the fairest of man by nature comes to be possessed of cruelty and fury when the army advances against the enemy. Therefore, Scripture warned: then you shall keep yourself from every evil [in a military camp] (Deut. 23:10).”
- 26 Edna Lomsky-Feder and Orna Sasson-Levy, *Women Soldiers and Citizenship in Israel: Gendered Encounters With the State*. London: Routledge, 2017, pp. 45–61.
- 27 Address by Rabbi Yigal Levinstein to students of the Eli *mechina*, reported in *Ha’aretz* (Hebrew Daily), July 18, 2016, p. A7.
- 28 See: Karin Carmit Yefet, “Synagogue and State in the Israeli Military A Story of ‘Inappropriate Integration,’” *Law & Ethics of Human Rights* 10 (2016): 223–294. Also: Chapter 25 by Sasson-Levy and Hartal in this volume.
- 29 Asher Cohen, Bernard Susser, “Women Singing, Cadets Leaving: The Extreme Case Syndrome in Religion–Army Relationships,” in: Elisheva Rosman-Stollman and Aharon Kampinsky (eds.) *Civil–Military Relations in Israel: Essays in Honor of Stuart A. Cohen*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, pp. 127–146.
- 30 Stuart Cohen, Aharon Kampinsky and Elisheva Rosman-Stollman, “Swimming Against the Tide: The Changing Functions and Status of Chaplains in the IDF,” *Religion, State & Society* 44 (2016): 65–74. On the history and evolution of the IDF rabbinate: Aharon Kampinsky, *By Order of the Rabbinate* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Carmel, 2015.
- 31 Cited Cohen et al., “Swimming Against the Tide: The Changing Functions and Status of Chaplains in the IDF.” See also, Levy, “The Theocratization of the IDF,” pp. 281–282.
- 32 Controversy increased when the press published an Order of the Day issued by Colonel Ofer Winter, commander of the IDF Givati Brigade, who informed his troops that they were about to go into battle against an enemy “that dares to curse, blaspheme and scorn the God of Israel.” Critics were quick to note that Winter was a graduate of a national–religious *mechina*. See: *Times of Israel*, July 12, 2014. www.timesofisrael.com/idf-commander-calls-on-troops-to-fight-blasphemous-gazans/
- 33 “Rabbi Rontzki Explains: Why I Rode in a Car on the Sabbath,” *Ynet* website, May 20, 2008.
- 34 This contention pervades several of the articles in Reuven Gal (ed.), *Between the Yarmulke and the Beret: Religion, Politics and the Military in Israel* (Hebrew). Ben Shemen: Modan, 2012.

8

Israeli Arab perspectives on security

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The main argument of this chapter is simple and straightforward. The Israeli state has securitized its relationship with its Palestinian citizens, a process that has both physical and ontological dimensions. Viewing these citizens as outsiders who constitute a threat to national security justifies continuous discrimination against them until this very day. These arguments are theoretically based on the common differentiation between physical and ontological security and the possible mismatch between them; on the debate over the morality of securitization and the necessary moral conditions that it needs to meet in order to be justified; and on the relevance of desecuritization, in order to promote the politics of civility that promote, in turn, reconciliatory state–minority relations.¹

Much of the literature on Israeli national security is written by security experts. Experts drawn from within the Jewish society and committed to a narrow, ethnic and militaristic epistemology of compliance. Their perceptions of security are framed in purely realist militaristic terms and therefore avoid the possible ramifications of security policies on the human fabric of society, especially when it comes to marginalized minorities.² Most security experts relate to national security from a state-centric point of view, conflating national security with state security. Moreover, most of them view national security in purely ethnic terms, emphasizing the security of the Jewish people inside and outside Israel. Such a perception equates the security of the state with that of the Jewish people, rendering the Palestinian citizens outside the realm of national security. Therefore, one has to go beyond the security discourse of Israeli military experts in order to avoid falling into the traps of their epistemological, ontological and normative assumptions.

The following analysis avoids such a flaw. It examines securitization – measures undertaken, and justified, in the name of security – in critical terms. The analysis therefore takes into consideration the asymmetry of power between the hegemonic Jewish society and the underprivileged Palestinian minority, which, as a result of its securitization by the Israeli political and military elites, has had to face discriminatory and repressive policies ever since the establishment of the Israeli state.

Securitization of the Palestinian citizens of the Jewish state

Given Israel's clear-cut military victory in the 1948 War and Palestinian defeat and dispersal, the

surviving Palestinian community inside those areas controlled by the Israeli army could not really pose any serious threat.³ On the contrary, their sense of defeat, their fear and anxiety led them simply to look for ways to survive the troubling period.⁴ These remaining Palestinians dared not take their presence in the newly declared state for granted and, indeed, feared they might very well face the same fate their displaced relatives experienced during and immediately after the war. Consequently, the strategy among these remaining elites – the leaders of regional clans and large families – focused on convincing the Israeli military authorities that they had reconciled themselves to the abnormal new reality on the ground. Mirroring this reality, during the first decades, this translated into Arab participation in national elections to the *Knesset* while also celebrating Israeli Independence Day.⁵

Corroborating evidence in the open archives shows that the country's political and military leadership were fully aware that the Palestinian inhabitants posed no serious security threat to the state or to the Jewish population. Also: that as a poor, defeated and fragmented community, the remaining Palestinians merely sought to survive and therefore were prepared to submit to the dictates of military officers in their areas of residence. Numerous researchers have gone on to show how the justifications for securitization provided by the government, the military and scholars identified with the state were seriously flawed.⁶ That process went much deeper than localized actions by the Israeli police and General Security Service in Arab villages and towns.

Physical securitization

Securitization of the Palestinian presence in the Jewish state is already apparent in the mind of its founding father, as mirrored in Ben-Gurion's statement, in 1950, "the Arabs should be judged by what they can possibly do, rather than by what they have done."⁷ Translating this thinking into practice, the provisional Israeli government in 1948 initiated an actual policy of securitization when on May 19 it established a military administration in Arab-populated areas, including mixed cities in the center of the country, such as Lidda, Ramleh, Jaffa and Askalan (Ashkelon today). This military administration based itself on emergency regulations dating from the earlier 1945 British emergency laws, especially provisions 109, 110, 111, 124, 125, enabling military officers to declare curfew, to close off geographical areas and to detain and expel without trial.⁸

Scholars of the period agree that establishing the military administration reflected the dominant perception among the ruling elite of the new state that those Palestinians remaining in areas controlled by the Israeli army could not and should not be treated as normal citizens in accordance with the declaration of independence. Instead, Arab citizens were viewed solely in security terms. The fact that they had family ties with Arabs living beyond the borders of the state led to the belief that they posed a direct security threat to the state and to the Jewish population, as did their concentration in heavily populated areas close to the 1949 armistice borders.⁹ Given full responsibility for the Palestinian population, the military security apparatus of that initial period functioned free of control by civil authorities, including the civil courts, on grounds of national security. This early securitization of the Palestinian Arab community remained in force despite its awareness of being wholly dependent on the Israeli authorities.

In retrospect, the securitization policy had both physical and ontological dimensions that need to be evaluated. At the physical level, all services provided to the community, including permission to move about and to travel and work permits, were at the whim of any military officer in that particular area of residency. Any such authorizations necessitated permission from

the military governor, who used his authority as a strong disciplinary mechanism. Hence, they tended to be granted in very limited numbers. This disciplinary power went well beyond immediate security concerns, with implications for national and party politics.

A committee appointed in 1955 to examine the future of the military administration, headed by a retired general and professor, Yohanan Ratner, listed the following as the administration's major goals: establishing the economic dependency of the Palestinian population through refusal or issuance of work permits; land confiscation; fragmentation of the Palestinian population based on geographical, sectarian and tribal grounds; and the segregation of Arab villages and towns.¹⁰ In its recommendations, submitted in February 1956, the Ratner Committee declared "the continuation of the military government in the areas indicated is indispensable for sustaining the security of the state."¹¹ This recommendation was heavily criticized by not only Arab and Communist leaders but also mainstream Zionist party leaders such as Yigal Allon (*Achdut Ha'avoda*), Menachem Begin (*Herut*), Yacov Hazan (*Mapam*) and Michael Assaf from the ruling *Mapai* party.¹²

Although the broad authorities granted to the military administration were gradually and progressively constricted, army officers continued to control and scrutinize the daily life of Palestinian Arab citizens until as late as 1966. Since then, their role has been assumed by two security forces already involved in surveillance and disciplinary measures: the Israeli police, especially the Agency for Special Affairs ("*Latam*"), and the General Security Services ("*Shabak*").¹³ Post-1967 Arab population management strategy has had as its priorities controlling, surveilling, de-developing and disciplining this Arab sector.

No matter the model used by scholars, whether "internal colonialism" or "control system," they all express how Israeli state authorities targeted both the physical and ontological dimensions of the Arab presence in Israel in order to ensure the Arab sector's submission and dependency. Precisely because these policies have not changed to the present, it is worth briefly demonstrating their manifestations in order to establish the securitization thesis at the center of this essay.

The consistency of securitization policy

The Arab presence as a minority in Israel is conceptualized in security terms by geographic and demographic segregation; by isolating and encircling Arab towns; and by discriminatory planning and zoning policies enacted by state institutions.¹⁴ Originating with the pre-1966 military government and underscored in the 1976 Koenig memorandum, a policy of demographic securitization has resulted in "Judaization" of formerly Arab areas.¹⁵ Witness the establishment of the Jewish towns of Carmiel, Upper Nazareth and Migdal Ha-Emek in the 1960s and the city of Harish in the Triangle area over the past several years; the "Seven Stars" settlement project (also in the Triangle area) in the 1970s; as well as the "Mitzpim" Plan implemented in the Galilee during the 1980s and continuing today.

None of these settlements necessarily reflect only the housing needs of the Jewish population. Rather, "Judaization as securitization" translates into land being transferred from Arab hands into state ownership, thereby enabling the establishment of Jewish settlements in between Arab towns while erasing territorial continuity between Arab-populated areas. Similarly, erecting settlement posts on hilltops across the Galilee and in the Triangle region between Jenin, Tulkarm and Nablus fulfills the role of a watchdog, monitoring Arab behavior and fragmenting the

demographic presence of the Arab population.¹⁶

Studies on planning and zoning in Israel and their implications for the Arab minority are largely ideological, defending a policy aimed at securitizing the Palestinians' very presence and in support of de-Palestinianization.¹⁷ This policy involves control, surveillance, fragmentation, segregation, marginalization and subordination, mirroring the militarization of Israeli population management policies. The argument is that the assumed Palestinian demographic threat justifies continuously shrinking the physical space in which Arab citizens live by zoning these areas and by either building a belt of Jewish settlements around Arab cities and towns or building highways. The larger, long-term effect is to limit their future development, thereby marginalizing their imprint on the physical, cognitive and psychological map of the Jewish population.

Settling and building the land have always been a major component of national security. Even before 1948, the intimate link between settlement and military strategy was embodied in the notion of "military outposts" and "military settlements." Early Jewish pioneering settlements were regarded as an integral part of Jewish defense and later military strategy, as manifested in the settlement policy of the Zionist movement, from *Hashomer* (established to protect Jewish settlements in Mandate Palestine) to the *Palmach* (a Jewish military strike force established in 1941) and the *Nahal* (an IDF paramilitary unit established in 1948). Each of these various military organizations trained settlers not only to protect and work the land but also to fight against any indigenous Arab resistance to their expansion.

In Zionist ideology, security is interpreted as meaning the protection of the territory and people of the Jewish state vis-à-vis the Arab presence. From the outset, this interpretation has encouraged capturing, controlling and settling territories populated by Arabs. Land confiscation is rationalized in terms of safeguarding the "living space" of the nation by securing and reserving territory for future generations. Since the Galilee, the Triangle and the Negev are populated by Arab citizens, the Israeli security establishment has utilized various legal, judicial and military means for promoting an ethno-national conception of security and control, doing so through organs inherited from the military government.¹⁸ Thus, settlers are deeply rooted in Israeli political thought as "citizens-pioneers-soldiers" marching ahead of the camp in a vanguard role.

An added dimension to Israeli securitization of the Palestinian Arab minority is the way the state's legal and judicial authorities treat security personnel, whether army or police officers, involved in killing Palestinian citizens. Israeli historians have produced evidence based on official documents verifying that between 1948 and 1952 the Israeli army killed hundreds of Palestinians attempting to return to their villages and homes.¹⁹ One may defend such behavior in wartime, when state security is not to be taken for granted. Nevertheless, the massacre in Kuffar Kasseem in October 1956 – when 49 Arabs were coldly killed by Israeli military and police officers for violating a curfew they knew nothing about – indicates that what happened could have not have been a local mistake. Especially since most of those responsible for the crime were subjected to nothing more than a mock trial, after which most were granted an amnesty.²⁰

Similar callousness manifested itself in 1976, during the first land day demonstrations, when six Arab citizens were killed by Israeli police.²¹ Arab citizens were again killed with unbearable ease during the October 2000 demonstrations in Arab areas; on that occasion 12 Arab citizens were shot dead by the police. Evidence presented in Israeli courts and to the Or Commission on this incident points up the police perception of Arab citizens as enemies.²² It might have been possible to frame these three events as an exceptional case of securitization had not tens more of Arab citizens been killed by the Israeli police since October 2000,²³ and the police officers

involved been tried. However, impunity is a fundamental part of the Israel's securitization culture. Investigations, run by the police themselves after the event, end up with the perpetrators escaping trial or any other legal, judicial or public condemnation. Evidence as to the way Israeli officials at the ministerial and bureaucratic levels treat killing Arab citizens is provided by a recent event in the unrecognized village of Umm Al-Hiran in the Negev. After ordering evacuation of the village in January 2017, police forces killed one of the inhabitants, the school teacher Yacoub Abu Alkian. The subsequent closure of the file on this incident by Israel's Attorney General reflects the official culture of impunity.

Ontological securitization

Securitization is concerned with how meaning is generated through the creation of a threat text. This ontological dimension of securitization relates to identity formation, where the very existence of an "other" comes to be perceived of as a threat. As shown by Lupovici, Israeli securitization policy towards Palestinians is marked by ontological dissonance,²⁴ for Palestinian Arabs, although citizens of the state who possess legal status, are living evidence of Zionism's "original sin" of demographic transformation of the land. They also disprove the exclusive national bond between Jews and the land of Israel–Palestine central to the Zionist narrative.²⁵

Consequently, ontological securitization of the Palestinian minority by official state agencies has been longstanding policy. Two examples suffice to serve as illustrations. The first is a process that I have elsewhere termed "manufacturing quiet Arabs"; the second is the legal and judicial disciplining of the Palestinian Arab minority.

Palestinians placed under the control of the Israeli army after 1948 did not believe the state would permit them to remain in their homes, after hundreds of thousands of their brethren had been expelled or had fled to safe areas.²⁶ Israeli security forces fully exploited this mindset in order to ensure total submission of the Palestinian community to Israeli control. The Palestinian Arabs who remained under Israeli jurisdiction after 1948 were granted Israeli citizenship as a safety net, but at the same time subject to a process of "re-birth." In a sense, for them history began anew and their collective past was remolded to match the new reality.²⁷

Accordingly, as guarantors for the safety of the remaining Palestinians, state agencies set standards to be followed and respected.²⁸ Political, educational and disciplinary policies deliberately sought to create this new minority's collective imagination as "Israeli Arabs."²⁹ That Arab citizens should fear the state, but also trust its potential capability to award them for demonstrating loyalty, served as the salient message of educational materials taught in Arab schools.³⁰

Insecurity and fear as a disciplining mechanism have facilitated this resocialization process in an educational system fully controlled by Jewish educators.³¹ Sentiments toward the Palestinian past or sympathy with the Palestinian cause, especially concerning historical injustices and the miserable reality of the refugees, were recast by state authorities as a serious security threat and betrayal of the commitments entailed within citizenship. State agents constructed the Israeli-Arab identity so that legal affiliation with the Israeli state would in effect determine not only the Palestinian minority's priorities but its worldview, too. This conscious policy, set in the 1950s and leading at one point to an attempt at drafting Arab citizens into army service,³² is still valid today in the debate over civil service required of Arab youth.³³

Still another disciplining mechanism utilized by the state to promote its ontological securitization is the mass media. Second only to the educational system, the media in Arabic – strongly linked to information organs operating through the Office of the Prime Minister, the Foreign Ministry and the Israeli Army – has long since become a central avenue for resocialization by manufacturing consent and by shaping a shared, collective imagination among Israel’s Arab citizens.³⁴

This policy of manufacturing consent by means of stringent submission, discipline and policing led to a number of newspapers in Arabic operated by the *Histadrut* labor federation and by the *Mapai* and *Mapam* Zionist parties. These newspapers competed to become the primary source of information and commentary in Arab society, aimed at the remaining Palestinian elite, a sector that Shmuel Toledano, the prime minister’s advisor on Arab affairs in the 1960s, referred to as the “quiet Arabs.”³⁵ Their shared goal in publishing was to redirect Arab consciousness toward normalized recognition of Israel as the Jewish state, so that Arabs would accept Israel’s existence as an accomplished fact as well as a permanent part of the natural Middle East order.

The second set of examples illustrating the ontological securitization of the Palestinian citizens of Israel consists of the legal and judicial policies towards them. Several major studies demonstrate how the Israeli court system has been an effective tool for (a) disciplining, (b) discriminating and (c) disempowering. Studies by Kretzmer, Saban, Jabareen and Jamal confirm that one cannot speak of equality in and before the law when comparing Palestinian and Jewish citizens in Israel.³⁶ These studies provide evidence for the common perception among Israelis that Palestinian citizens pose a direct threat to the Jewish identity of the state.

The emphasis on individual citizenship rights while voiding the collective rights of the Palestinian minority represents a clear expression of ontological securitization, with the Nation-State Bill best demonstrating the “hollowing out” of Palestinian citizenship.³⁷ Since 2011, the Jewish Nation-State Bill has gone through three iterations. The initial section includes three basic principles.

- Israel is defined as the “national state of the Jewish people in which it realizes its aspiration for self-determination based on its cultural and historical tradition.”

This formulation makes clear that no other cultural or historical tradition, namely that of the Palestinian citizens, can be incorporated into the identity of the state. The national home of the Jewish people cannot also be the national home of citizens who are not of Jewish descent.

- “The right to materialize national self-determination in the State of Israel is exclusive for the Jewish people.”

This right is *exclusive* to the Jewish people. No other people(s) may argue for self-determination within the sovereign territory of the state. However, since Israel’s borders are undefined, they could conceivably be extended to include everything within the Green Line (so-called Israel proper) as well as the territories occupied in 1967. Applying Israeli law in or around Jerusalem, or in area C, means that the other side of the coin of exclusive self-determination is the denial of the same right to any other people in areas deemed to be part of the State of Israel.

- The clear intention behind this bill is to “protect the standing of Israel, as the national state of the Jewish people, in order to encode in a basic law the values of the State of Israel as a

Jewish and democratic state in accordance with the principles of the declaration of independence.”

Read carefully, this clause reflects the concern by the Jewish majority supporting the bill for the identity and character of the state. It is precisely this concern that justifies the ontological securitization of those believed to pose a threat to the Jewish character of the state, namely its Palestinian Arab citizens who demand Israel’s transformation into a state of all its citizens.³⁸ It is this aspiration for equality that the bill targets.

Two other clauses of the bill that reinforce the point made in this section relate to the official state language, Hebrew. The first of these two clauses in effect clearly demotes Arabic from a second official language to one that possesses only a “special status” in the country. The second important clause is that which defines the relationship between the State of Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. Not only does it declare the state’s commitment to protect Jews no matter where they live but also expresses the state’s pledge to protect, to develop and to provide education on Jewish historical and cultural traditions for Jews in the Diaspora. This might not have been significant had not the next clause placed responsibility for protecting the cultures, traditions, language and identity of the non-Jewish citizens on those citizens themselves rather than on the state. The immediate implication is that the state is entitled to exclude non-Jews from the allocation of public resources necessary for developing and maintaining their cultural identity.

In summary, the proposed bill formally secures a divorce between, on the one hand, the national rights of the Jewish people and, on the other hand, the civil rights of citizens of the state. It makes the Jewish people sole custodians of the State of Israel while characterizing Palestinian Arab citizens as a group of individuals whose efforts to guarantee their national identity and culture constitute an ontological threat that must be securitized. The concept employed in justifying these measures is that of “defensive democracy.”³⁹

Minority security perceptions

That Israel’s Arab citizens have never posed a serious threat to the physical security of the Jewish majority or to the state is patently clear from the collective behavior of the Palestinian community during times of war and during the first and second *Intifadas*. This, despite their national sentiments, expressed in literature and poetry, in the arts and in the media. The lack of any physical securitization is also reflected in their historic decision to act within the Israeli legal system and according to law, as proved by the fact that only a very low number of Palestinian citizens have actually been involved in terror attacks or have directly endangered state security.⁴⁰

If anything, state securitization has led Arab citizens to reaffirm their Palestinian identity and culture. While not constituting an autonomous political entity and lacking the institutions for making collective decisions, ways of protecting their identity have come to represent a counter-securitization strategy. Indeed, their struggle for individual and collective civil rights has made them aware of their power to ontologically “insecuritize” the Jewish sense of being.

This ontological securitization divides into two major periods. The first, which is of lesser interest to us, runs from 1948 to 1976 and is characterized by compliance and submission for the sake of survival. Notwithstanding the state’s insistent perception of their mere presence in Israel as a threat, the vast majority of Palestinian citizens sought to integrate into Israel’s economy and politics.⁴¹ Certainly, during this period some opposition voices could be heard, notably: the *al-*

Ard movement, the Communist party, the *abna'a al-Balad* and *Usrat Al-Jihad* movement, as well as Palestinian poets and artists who criticized state policies.⁴² Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority within Palestinian society overall has adopted an integrative stance, without challenging their physical and ontological securitization by the state. The memory of loss and fear of repression and expulsion continued to be very dominant in their public consciousness and discourse.⁴³ Indeed, civic patriotism was the predominant sentiment among the elites and the broader population, which expected the state to honor its promises and enable civic equality among Jews and Arabs alike.

General disappointment with Israeli policies, especially after 1967, bred discontent and initiated a process of “reawakening” among the Palestinian Arab elite in Israel that brought about major changes, foremost being politicization of the indigenous Palestinian population. This resultant politics of indigeneity feature (a) rejection of the Zionist narrative about the historical bond between the Jewish people and their homeland, and (b) the demand that Israel be transformed from an exclusive Jewish state into a state of its all citizens.⁴⁴

This more recent process of unconcealed dissatisfaction with their citizenship status has led a rising number of Arab-Palestinian intellectuals and politicians to reframe the Arab struggle for equality by refocusing their search for full citizenship in Israel. The emphasis now is upon obligating the state to recognize them as an indigenous national minority deserving rights extending beyond citizenship status alone.⁴⁵ Reframing on this scale is a necessarily gradual and dialectical process – one that has scaled several peaks in the last few decades.

A premier example is publication of the “future vision” documents by a number of Arab-Palestinian NGOs between December 2006 and May 2007. In this context, indigeneity has become a central political formula promoted by the political, civic and intellectual leadership as a basic characteristic of the Arab-Palestinian community located in its historical framework, which precedes the state. Accordingly, the demand for indigenous rights in addition to citizenship entails righting past wrong doings committed by the state, especially material and cultural dispossession, as well as finding an acceptable solution for the problem of internally displaced refugees.

Politicizing indigeneity is, therefore, not only about official recognition of outstanding claims based on differences but also about addressing grievances against the state on indigenous terms. It is about power and power-sharing. Not only the integration of indigenous individuals into the country’s political, social and economic systems, but also recognition of collective rights and participation in decision-making through consociational or federal institutions, or both. Politicizing indigeneity also means restoring the historic, symbolic and material bond between oppressed Palestinians and their past, integrating this past into the current structure of the state.

The transformation in Arab politics towards politicizing indigeneity, while still in its initial stage, can be understood as ontological counter-securitization. For it aims at refuting the Israeli Zionist narrative and transferring the moral dissonance and anxiety to the Jewish majority. The number of Arab intellectuals and politicians using the indigenous discourse when fighting to legitimate Arab rights in Israel is definitely on the rise, with most Arab citizens presently insisting they are the native inhabitants of Palestine.

Another possible interpretation of this politicization of indigeneity is that its goal is to promote sovereign equality within the state of Israel between the various ethnic components of Israeli society. Although this demand does not challenge the territorial integrity of the state, it does confront the exclusive sovereignty of the Jewish majority.⁴⁶ By forcefully expressing its rejection of the conditions of loyalty set by the Jewish majority, today’s Arab-Palestinian

political elite offers a counter discourse that translates into ontological insecurity among the Jewish majority.

Concluding remarks: desecuritization and civility

The above discussion argues that securitization theory is of great importance in explicating state-minority relations in post-colonial settings. Clearly, securitization of the Palestinian presence within the 1948–1949 armistice lines has gone well beyond mere control of the Palestinian population in the Galilee, the Triangle and the Negev area. It is equally evident that securitization by Israeli authorities had not been and could never have been justified on purely realist terms.

One can further argue that state securitization inevitably leads to counter-securitization. Arab political consciousness and discourse make evident that their view of Israeli security is essentially determined by their own identity and experience of the last 70 years. Discriminatory state policies have convinced Israel's Arab citizens that they are perceived solely and negatively in the narrow context of security, and so, in response, they regard Israeli security concerns as being inherently antagonistic toward their identity and very presence in their own rightful homeland.

Two attitudes have combined to cause Israel's Arab citizens to struggle for equality and recognition through legal means. One is distrust of the state and its security apparatus. The other is the strong conviction of their justice in demanding the recognition due them as equal citizens. Their collective behavior, albeit critical of state policies, reflects caution, maturity and an abiding suspicion towards the real intentions of the security apparatus of the state.

Respect for the rules of the game and their endeavors to seek equality, despite state securitization policies, has gradually made them aware of their power, prompting the current generation of Arab-Palestinians to begin reframing their struggle for equality in ways that counter-securitize the sense of being of the Jewish majority. Put differently, politicizing indigeneity renders ontological counter-securitization indispensable.

Given the asymmetry of power in state–minority relations, securitization and counter-securitization continue to color relations between Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinian Arab fellow citizens in decidedly negative terms. Therefore, desecuritization in the sense of civilizing the state and its relations with all its citizens around the principle of equality is the precondition for promoting mutual recognition and mutual respect that can lead to reconciliation.

Notes

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- 8 Osczaky-Lazar, "The Military Government."
- 9 Hillel Cohen, *Good Arabs: The Israeli Security Agencies and the Israeli Arabs, 1948–1967*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010.
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- 11 Quoted in Bäuml, *Blue White Shadow*, p. 224.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- 13 Ahmad Sa'di, "Stifling Surveillance: Israel's Surveillance and Control of the Palestinians During the Military Government Era," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 68 (2016): 36–55.
- 14 Kafkafi, "Segregation or Integration of the Israeli Arabs"; Gazi Falah, "Israeli 'Judaization' Policy in the Galilee and Its Impact on Local Arab Urbanization," *Political Geography Quarterly* 8 (1989): 229–253.
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9

The Supreme Court as a forum for national security discourse

Amichai Cohen

A well-documented characteristic of Israel's national security discourse is that much of it takes place inside the courtroom and under legal proceedings. Granted, the Israeli Supreme Court (ISC) intervenes in security matters less than in other spheres of national life. Even so, over the years it has heard far more petitions with respect to security issues than any other national court in a liberal democracy during a comparable period. It has also passed judgment on such cases more frequently than any comparable institution.¹

Various hypotheses are advanced in order to explain this phenomenon and to account for the fact that the Israeli political system tolerates it. Some observers deny the ISC follows a clear "policy" with respect to national security issues, arguing that each court decision be analyzed individually and on its own merits.² An alternative school of thought depicts ISC intervention in security affairs as merely a fig leaf, designed to provide a veil of legitimacy for illegal actions perpetrated by Israel and its security services. In this view, by exhibiting a façade of military actions subject to judicial review, the Court helps the country prevent external judicial intervention in its activities.³

According to a third explanation, the growing intrusion of the ISC in military matters, evident since the early 1990s, is simply another facet of its overall activism. The Court tends to intervene in other areas too, and hence possesses no specific agenda with respect to military matters. In this reading, usually associated with the views of the former President of the ISC, Aharon Barak, the Court's principal function is to strike a balance between state interests and democratic values.⁴

This chapter suggests that the decisions of the ISC should indeed be viewed as general attempts to affect policy, and not merely as individual decisions. It argues, however, that in addition to the various claims made above, there exists a unique reason for judicial intervention in military and security matters. Specifically, any attempt to understand fully the role of the ISC in the Israeli security discourse must begin by identifying the special and distinctive characteristics of the relationship between Israel's national security situation and its identity as a democratic state. Only then is it possible to comprehend that overcoming challenges to the core values of Israeli democracy posed by perceived security threats is what lies behind the ISC's decisions. This is a unique task in that no other modern liberal democracy faced with similar challenges has managed to retain its democratic character.

Politically, the position of the ISC is complicated. Israel enjoys the legitimacy that judicial

review provides for its actions, and hails this judicial review as proof for its democratic character. However, Israel's political institutions are only willing to tolerate judicial review and limitation on security policy if it abides by two conditions. First, the review must be limited. Second, it must not affect the basic premises of Israel's security policy, as defined by the political institutions. Deviations from these limits make a clash between the Court and politicians imminent.

After an introduction to the subject, this chapter first itemizes the unique national security tests confronting Israeli democracy and offers an explanation for ISC responses to them. Based on readings of specific ISC decisions, [we then proceed to](#) demonstrate in detail how the Court seeks to attain its goals before going on to assess how current trends in Israeli politics affect ISC decisions and concludes by suggesting possible trends.

Controlling security forces in Israel's democracy

In democracies, writes Peter Feaver, "the most basic political question is how to ... reconcile a military strong enough to do anything the civilians ask, with a military subordinate enough to do only what civilians authorize."⁵ In Israel that challenge is made especially acute by the prominence of three characteristics, each of which distinguishes Israel's democracy from that of other countries.

The first is the singular nature of the legal regime under which Israel's democracy operates. During the very first days of the state's existence, the *Knesset* (Israel's legislative branch) declared Israel to be in a "State of Emergency." Then, and ever since, that declaration has constituted the basis for the promulgation of Emergency Decrees and the enactment of laws relevant only in a state of emergency. This state of emergency is routinely renewed by the *Knesset*, thereby leaving many emergency decrees and laws in effect. So too are the Defense (Emergency) Regulations (1945) Israel inherited from the British mandate.

Reflecting the persistence of security threats that are a permanent feature of Israeli life, this situation has resulted in the delegation of major powers by the legislative branch to the executive.⁶ These authorities, in turn, permit government agencies to take action in numerous spheres, some of them only partially connected with security, extending from military censorship to house demolitions, and from price controls to employment relations.

Indeed, so extensive is the range covered by emergency decrees, and so vast their secondary influence on other multiple areas of state activity, that until recently the annulment of the State of Emergency had seemed highly unlikely. This was because so many legal powers of Israel's executive branch were based on laws in effect only in a state of emergency. As much was admitted by the ISC, which in 2012 finally rejected a petition originally submitted in 1999 that it review the reasonability of the constant, automatic and renewed state of emergency (*Association for Civil Rights in Israel v. Knesset*).⁷ Pressured by the Court to amend legislation conditional upon a state of emergency, the *Knesset* has managed in the past decade to somewhat rectify this situation by amending some of the emergency legislation, which it reenacted as regular laws.

One of the most important advances is the enactment of a counter-terrorism law (2016) that is completely independent of any declaration of emergency. Yet, these efforts by the *Knesset* have been piecemeal, and emergency powers therefore remain a very important part of the texture of Israeli law. They are particularly relevant to national security law since some of the powers they bestow on the executive are executed not only by the civil authorities but by security

organizations (the IDF, the General Security Service etc.), over which the *Knesset* exercises little supervision.

A second distinguishing characteristic of Israeli democracy is that, at least since 1967, government agencies exercise control over a large population of civilians who are not Israeli citizens. That situation runs counter to the trend paramount in other liberal democracies, which since the commencement of the era of decolonization have ceased to control large populations of non-citizens for extended periods of time.⁸ The reasons for this discrepancy, now in existence for more than half a century, lay outside the scope of the present chapter. What is relevant to note is that, at least formally, the area known as the West Bank (alternatively “the Territories”) is held or occupied by Israel without applying Israeli sovereignty. Formally, these territories fall outside the scope of the Israeli legislature’s authority. At present, Israeli activities there are controlled by the IDF, with the local military commander serving as the source of all legal authority.

The singularity of Israel’s democracy is compounded by the influence of yet a third feature: the prominent role played in Israeli society by the armed forces, even outside the limited context of military activity per se. Among the constellation of circumstances responsible for this standing are: conscription of most 18-year-olds into the IDF; the size of the Ministry of Defense’s budget (larger than that of any other government department); and the number of persons employed in the IDF, the Ministry of Defense and private as well as governmental manufacturers of security-related products.

Yet, at no stage in the past have the Israeli security services ever posed a specific threat to Israel’s core character as a liberal democracy, and seem unlikely to do so in the future. No evidence exists to indicate an instance of outright disobedience by the armed forces to direct orders from their civilian superiors, or even a serious challenge to their authority. Therefore, Israeli democracy need not concern itself with prospects for a military coup, although given the important role of security agencies in Israel it is important (a) to identify those values by which they operate, and (b) that they follow civilian directives.⁹

The Supreme Court and the challenge to Israeli society

Encouraging petitions

That Palestinian residents of the West Bank are denied direct political power,¹⁰ do not possess the right to vote in elections to Israel’s parliament, have no voice in Israeli politics and do not have their interests taken into consideration during the Israeli decision-making process constitutes a major challenge to Israeli democracy. Posing issues both symbolic and substantive, this problem has been addressed by the ISC. And while the Court has not specifically addressed denial of the Palestinians’ right to vote, it has focused on the need to instigate alternative procedures for taking their interests into account.

This enterprise has proceeded in several stages, first by opening the Court to Palestinian petitions against activities by the military government in the disputed West Bank territories. The precedent was set in 1973, in what became known as the “Rafiah approach” case (*Abu Chilu v. The Government of Israel*).¹¹ The Court agreed to hear a petition tabled by a Palestinian resident of the West Bank claiming Israeli military authorities had violated the international law of occupation. In taking that step, the Court not only announced its intention to consider the petition but also declared that when evaluating the complaint lodged by the Palestinian it would apply the

clear set of legal norms laid down by the international law of occupation. Implicit in this approach was the requirement that the relevant military authorities be obligated to show their actions conformed to the standards of those legal norms and to provide accurate information regarding specific cases.

In the 1980s, the Court went a step further by easing what was known as “the standing” requirement. Thereto, it had been customary to accept only petitions submitted by individuals who could show the alleged violation of law had caused them personal injury. However, in *Ressler v. Minister of Defense* (1988),¹² Supreme Court Justice Aharon Barak declared he would be prepared to bend that rule should the case concern a subject of public importance. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) immediately took advantage of Barak’s ruling to petition the Court with respect to alleged instances of military misconduct in the Territories. The number of such petitions thereafter grew incrementally.¹³

The long shadow of the Court

Awareness that petitions on behalf of Palestinians were now more likely to be heard by the Court directly prodded the military authorities to take preemptive steps of their own to ameliorate at least the most glaring instances of wrongdoing. Indicating the extent to which the ISC made itself felt long before cases reached the courtroom, this response has been described as reflecting “the shadow of the law,”¹⁴ a phenomenon especially evident when NGOs presented instances of IDF behavior in the territories as indicative of general policies rather than as individual aberrations of conduct. It then became clear that were such petitions to be discussed in Court, lawyers representing the defendant (i.e., the government) would indeed be required to divulge details of overall military policies. To avoid doing so they were compelled to adopt alternative measures.

One such alternative has been extensively described by Yoav Dotan,¹⁵ who documents how during the first *Intifada* (1987–1993) the Attorney General’s office developed a system whereby government lawyers would review all petitions before their actual submission. Often, these lawyers, who were in contact with the military establishment, granted immediate redress, the result being that – even without actually appearing in Court – Palestinians obtained a “voice” in the Israeli system, meaning Israeli military authorities could no longer act arbitrarily towards Palestinian civilians in the Territories.

It is important to note this development had been anticipated, and intended, by members of the Court. As much was made explicit by Justice Meir Shamgar. One of the most distinguished members of the Israeli bench, Shamgar served in several critical judicial capacities for a period spanning over three decades: as IDF Military Advocate General (1961–1968), as Israel’s Attorney General (1968–1975) and as Justice of the ISC (1975–1995), over which he presided from 1983 to 1995. On at least one occasion Shamgar explicitly acknowledged his goal in not opposing Palestinian petitions to the Court was to facilitate review over the military.¹⁶

A set of ISC decisions requiring military authorities in the Territories to adopt specific procedures before imposing severe sanctions on Palestinian residents greatly facilitated Justice Shamgar’s professed aim. For instance, in *ACRI v. Minister of Defense*,¹⁷ the ISC in 1993 ordered the military authorities to conduct a hearing before resorting to the sanction of deportation – a requirement that in all probability contributed to this policy’s discontinuation for more than two decades. Similarly, the Court has ruled that mandatory hearings be conducted

before the implementation of house demolitions.

Facilitation: the Court as mediator

In some cases, the Court has gone much further than simply providing a forum for the hearing of Palestinian claims. It has actively taken upon itself the role of mediator between military interests and civilian rights. For example, a set of ISC decisions handed down during the spring of 2002, when the second *Intifada* was at its height.¹⁸ Following terrorist attacks in March 2002, the Israeli government ordered the IDF to undertake a large-scale infantry and armored assault on terrorist infrastructures located in Palestinian-controlled cities. During the course of that operation, the IDF laid siege to the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, where some 40 Palestinian terrorists had taken refuge and held captive over 180 hostages. Petitioned to instruct the siege be lifted and the IDF provide the hostages with food and other basic needs, the Court acted as a broker between the sides, thereby aiding in solving the immediate crisis. Here, too, the ISC provided a partial solution to the democratic challenge posed by Israel's military control of non-citizen civilians.

Judicial review of military policy

As previously mentioned, Israel's security forces wield substantial legal powers – both in the Territories, where the military commander constitutes the sole source of legal authority, and in Israel proper, where emergency decrees apply. Since many of the powers afforded the security forces by these legal channels impose severe limits on the rights of civilians, they have the potential for infringing on human rights.

The ISC has addressed this danger too by adopting strict standards of review respecting the way in which security forces make use of the powers at their disposal. Here, again, a chronological and evolutionary process can be observed. During the first years of Israel's statehood the Court displayed deference towards the application of emergency powers used by the security forces. Justice Agranat, appointed to the ISC in 1949 and its president in the years 1965–1976, formulated the *locus classicus* of this position in a judgment handed down already in 1950.

The jurisdiction of this court to review the competent authority's exercise of powers emanating from the Defence (Emergency) Regulations, 1945, is of very limited character... . The Court's function is limited to examining whether the said authority may have exceeded its power under the law by virtue of which it was empowered to act. Or whether the said authority acted in good faith.

*(Al Ayubi v. Minister of Defense)*¹⁹

However, by the late 1980s that position, too, had become subject to progressive erosion. How far the process had gone was demonstrated by a judgment Chief Justice Barak handed down in 1989, both the wording and tone of which offer a striking contrast to the position taken by Agranat some four decades earlier. The message now sent by the Court was that security issues would not be treated as a separate legal category. Instead, judicial review of executive action based on emergency powers would be encompassed within the Court's review of all other

executive powers.

Judges are not bureaucrats, but the principle of separation of powers obliges them to review the legality of the decisions of bureaucrats. In this matter there is no special status to security consideration, which must also be subject to judicial review. Just as the Court is able and obliged to review the reasonableness of professional discretion in every area, so must it do so in the realm of security. In other words, there are no special limits on the power of judicial review in matters of state security.

*(Schnitzer v. Chief Military Censor)*²⁰

Notwithstanding the *Schnitzer* declaration, for several years the Court in practice continued to defer to the judgment of the executive branch, as represented by the military commander of the territories. Hence, in his seminal 2002 review of ISC decisions respecting the territories prior to the year 2000, David Kretzmer was correct to observe that:

In its decisions relating to the occupied territories, the Court has rationalized virtually all controversial actions of the Israeli authorities, especially those most problematic under principles of international humanitarian law.²¹

After 2000, the direction of the Court changed. In a series of decisions, most authored by Justice Barak, the ISC did indeed begin to put into practice the principle of equality enunciated in *Schnitzer*, thus holding the executive to the same standards of accountability in security matters as in other policy spheres. Remarkable is the context in which this was done, considering that from Israel's point of view the wave of violence erupting in the Territories in September 2000 ("the second *Intifada*") could certainly be considered a national security "emergency." By the end of 2004, as many as 1,027 Israelis – 70% of them civilians – had been killed in Palestinian attacks, and more than 5,500 wounded.²²

Over the same period, more than 3,000 Palestinians were also killed as a result of IDF countermeasures,²³ as a result of which government lawyers designated the situation one of "armed conflict" under international law – a designation in which the Court concurred (e.g., *Public Committee Against Torture v. The Government*).²⁴ The implication was that the relevant legal regime controlling armed activities and applicable in the Territories was neither that of human rights nor the law of occupation, but International Humanitarian Law (IHL). The choice was deliberate. By definition, IHL allows the armed forces more flexibility; by its application, Israeli lawyers meant to create both a space and a timeframe in which extraordinary emergency rules could be applied.²⁵

This strategy was only partially successful. Although the ISC did acknowledge the existence of an "armed conflict" in the Territories, it did not forego its right of review. On the contrary, it now applied that right by using as a yardstick the very standards of IHL on which the government wished to rely.

The most prominent examples of the Court's conduct in this respect revolve around the "security/separation barrier" Israel began to construct in 2002 in an effort at impeding the movement of terrorists bent on attacking Israeli civilian targets (collectively designated "the separation barrier cases"). Israeli military officials were adamant this physical obstacle substantially reduced the level of Palestinian incursions and attacks,²⁶ But opponents of its

construction castigated the economic, social and psychological hardships allegedly caused numerous Palestinians living in the vicinity by what they termed the “apartheid wall,” as well as the injustices inherent in the fact that in many instances it had been built on Palestinian-owned land.²⁷

The most explicit attempt on the part of the ISC to balance conflicting aspects of the separation barrier issues is contained in Justice Barak’s decision in *Beit Sourik Village Council v. The Government of Israel* (2004).²⁸ Barak accepted the State’s argument that the barrier had been erected to serve security purposes, and not to promote a political agenda. Consequently, he was prepared to sanction infractions on human rights, such as the confiscation of private lands situated on the route of its construction, but where he drew a line was against granting the military sole discretion in determining what actions could and could not be taken. As he wrote in paragraph 48 of his judgment:

The military commander is the expert regarding the military quality of the separation fence route. We are experts regarding its humanitarian aspects. The military commander determines where, on hill and plain, the separation fence will be erected. That is his expertise. We examine whether this route’s harm to the local residents is proportional. That is our expertise.

On the basis of this outlook, in both the *Beit Sourik* case and in several subsequent cases, the Court took upon itself the task of reviewing almost every kilometer of the separation barrier, while also examining decisions by the military commanders regarding its route. Using a combination of international law and Israeli constitutional and administrative law, it thereby significantly limited the ability of the security forces to use their power to infringe on human rights.

Precisely the same attitude was manifest in what colloquially became known as the “early warning” decision, handed down in *Adalah v. OC Central Command*²⁹ in 2005, towards the end of Barak’s term of office as ISC President. At issue: the “neighbor practice” – a procedure whereby the IDF used civilians as intermediaries tasked with persuading terrorists in their neighborhood to surrender peacefully. This practice raised several problems, one substantive. Did it not violate the prohibition, enshrined in IHL, against armed forces intentionally endangering the lives of civilians by deliberately involving them in military operations?

Just as relevant were the procedural problems; since (as pointed out earlier) Palestinians living in the territories possess no voice in the Israeli political system, how might they articulate their protests against a policy endangering their lives? It is highly unlikely that an innocent resident of a refugee camp dragged out of bed by an Israeli military unit in the dead of night and “asked” to serve as an intermediary to a terrorist (the scenario depicted in the “early warning” case), would be able to petition the ISC in person. Instead, his only recourse was for the Court to permit an NGO to present a “general” petition against the “neighbor” practice.

That is precisely what the Court did. In addition to accepting the representation of the NGO, it also declared the “neighbor practice” illegal, thereby placing definite restrictions on the executive’s prerogatives. Even in times of national security emergencies, it declared, in a democratic country certain actions remain prohibited.

Enforcing societal values

The Court's determination to preserve democratic values from encroachment in the name of national security is equally apparent in several Israeli domestic spheres, some of which deserve to be addressed individually.

Freedom of speech

As noted above, as early as 1953 Justice Agranat famously defined free expression as a basic democratic right that could only be overruled by executive action when there existed a "near certainty" that its exercise would endanger the public good and national security (*Kol Ha-Am v. Minister of the Interior*).³⁰ By the 1980s (albeit not before) this position had developed into a general principle respecting the public's "right to know" which severely limited the security agencies from keeping information to themselves.³¹

Schnitzer v. Chief Military Censor (1989; referred to above) provides an example of this incremental process. In its judgment, the Court overruled the decision of the military censor to forbid a newspaper from publishing criticisms of actions taken by the outgoing head of the *Mossad* (the government agency responsible for intelligence gathering and covert operations abroad). Reiterating the formula laid down by Agranat in 1953, the ISC explicitly declared its determination to ensure military interests yield to democratic norms.

Gender equality

Two further ISC decisions constitute landmarks in the defense of gender equality in the security context. The first, handed down in 1995, supported the petition presented by Ms. Alice Miller, a South African-born flying enthusiast of draft age, whose application for acceptance to the air force's fighter pilot training course had been rejected by the IDF on the grounds of gender. In *Alice Miller v. Minister of Defense*³² the Court bluntly declared an applicant's gender to be an irrelevant consideration. That women combat pilots might perform fewer years of military service than their male counterparts (claiming exemption from reserve duty once they gave birth) was a price that the IDF had to pay in the name of gender equality.

Four years later, in *Jane Doe v. the Chief of the General Staff*,³³ the Court addressed a separate gender issue. Here the high court barred the promotion of a senior general convicted of sexual harassment even though he had earlier been punished by a military disciplinary proceeding. At stake, the Court decided, was something far more important than the possible future contribution the officer concerned might make to the IDF's operational capabilities. What counted was "the supreme importance of the IDF's moral probity." In other words, here too the court was performing a monitoring role, by ensuring military conduct conform to standards of behavior considered normative in society at-large.³⁴

Equality in service – the ISC and the exemption of ultra-Orthodox students

Following the precedent set by an arrangement concluded between Ben-Gurion and ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) leaders in 1947, successive ministers of defense over the course of several decades thereafter regularly granted draft deferment to *haredi* males claiming to be engaged in

full-time study of traditional Judaism's sacred texts. Remarkably, what had initially been a limited occurrence, which in 1948 affected less than 400 individuals, mushroomed over time. Each year more than 10,000 *haredi* males reach 18, the age of mandatory service. Notwithstanding the government's efforts to encourage them to enlist, only a small percentage does so.³⁵

Beginning in the late 1990s, the ISC has expressed growing unease over this arrangement as an infringement upon the democratic principle of equality. It first made its views known in 1998 by declaring deferment cannot be granted by the Minister of Defense without express legislative authorization (*Rubinstein v. Minister of Defense*).³⁶ In 2012, the Court went further and ruled that the law enacted by the *Knesset* in response to the *Rubenstein* decision violates the principle of equality, mainly because draft deferments (in effect draft-exemptions) were being granted without clear quotas and tests (*Ressler v. The Knesset*).³⁷ As detailed below, this dialogue between the Court and *Knesset* remains ongoing.

To summarize, by using a repertoire of judicial techniques and doctrines the Court has significantly limited the power and authority of the government in security matters. This does not mean the Court has succeeded in correcting all the deficiencies of the Israeli security mechanism, but it has allowed Israeli democracy to remain faithful to most of its core characteristics as a liberal democracy.

Political response and withdrawal?

Recent developments in Israeli politics indicate the climate of opinion in which the ISC operates is undergoing significant shifts. By far the most relevant is the way in which prominent sections of the political community are beginning to push back against extended judicial review of government activity in general.³⁸ In the name of "governance" and majority rule, attempts are also underway to limit the power of those institutions the Court created in order to solidify its own position.

One general signpost of this new trend is the spate of criticisms voiced over the ISC's independence and its authority to conduct judicial review of government action in general. More specifically, the process whereby judges are nominated to the Supreme Court has become politicized, with politicians taking care not to select candidates whose record indicates a tendency to adopt "activist" positions. Likewise, parallel efforts are underway to limit civil society organizations and their access to the Court. There is an ongoing campaign against those NGOs receiving donations from foreign governments and bringing complaints against Israeli military policy to the attention of the international community.³⁹

The incumbent Minister of Justice has also supported proposals limiting access to the ISC solely to those specific parties whose rights have allegedly been infringed – a step that, if implemented, would severely restrain the ability of NGOs to petition the ISC against general policies.⁴⁰ In a recent case the Minister of Education barred his own ministry from any contact with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, because ACRI "defends terrorists" in Israeli courts.⁴¹

There are signs this political trend is affecting the workings of the Court and that the Court, in turn, has begun adopting positions decidedly less "activist." In 2012, the ISC rejected a petition against a law decreasing public financing of organizations (usually Arab-Israeli bodies) that participate in ceremonies "mourning" Israel's Independence Day (*Graduates of the Arab-*

Orthodox High School v. Minister of Finance).⁴² In the same year, it likewise rejected a petition against a law, which applies almost exclusively to Arab–Israeli citizens, barring entry to Israel of spouses from the Territories or Arab countries (*MK Zehava Galon v. Attorney General*).⁴³ In 2015, the ISC approved laws categorizing a call for a boycott on Israel or Israeli products as an actionable tort, although it struck down a specific article in the law, which allowed courts to award compensation without damages in cases of boycott (*Uri Avneri v. The Knesset*).⁴⁴

Trends of judicial withdrawal from a blatantly activist position may also be evident in areas touching most directly on matters of security, especially pertaining to the rights of Palestinians. For example, in 2014 Israel began to resort once again to a policy of demolishing houses belonging to terrorists, a policy thought abandoned in 2005 because the IDF had been convinced the ISC would declare it illegal.⁴⁵ No such deterrent effect is now evident. In fact, since 2014 the Court has approved house demolitions in dozens of cases.⁴⁶ Likewise, the Court’s intervention in ongoing military operations has been curbed. During Operation Protective Edge, conducted by the IDF in the Gaza Strip in 2014, the ISC did not discuss a single petition relevant to the ongoing military activity – a state of affairs that contrasts markedly with the situation during the second *Intifada*.

Certainly, many judgments of the Court still follow the older judicial stance. At the end of 2014 it ordered evacuation of the illegal settlement Amona against the position of the government (*Hamed v. Minister of Defense*).⁴⁷ In 2017, the ISC once again declared unconstitutional an attempt by the *Knesset* to deal with the deferment and exemption from service of *haredi* men (*Movement for the Quality of Government v. The Knesset*).⁴⁸ Likewise, late in 2017, the Court denied the Netanyahu Government the right to use the corpses of perpetrators of Palestinian terrorist attacks as bargaining chips in negotiations to secure the return of Israeli casualties and citizens. Instead, it ordered that corpses be returned to their families for burial (*Alyan v. Commander of IDF Forces in the West Bank*).⁴⁹

Conclusion

Over the years, the ISC has played a vital role in preserving Israel as a democracy, notwithstanding the unique security challenges Israel has persistently been compelled to confront. On the other hand, recent trends give rise to the suspicion that the preservation of that tradition might be endangered. Primarily, this is because the position occupied by the Court as a bulwark of democracy has always been conditioned on the willingness of Israel’s political elite to sustain democratic values and – whatever their disagreements with specific ISC decisions – to acknowledge the importance of the ISC’s contribution to Israel’s character as a democratic liberal state. Of late, evidence suggests a weakening of this commitment by some of Israel’s political elite to the general values the ISC has represented: human rights, respect for minorities, the rights of Palestinians and the importance of civil society for a functioning democracy. Should this worrisome trend continue and intensify, it would seriously impair the ability of the Israeli Supreme Court to influence the tone and content of Israel’s national security discourse.

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- 6 Menachem Hofnung, *Democracy, Law and National Security in Israel*. Aldershot: Dartmouth, 1996.
- 7 High Court of Justice (hereafter HCJ) [file number] HCJ 391/99; [judgment issued in] 2012.
- 8 The only other comparable example known to me of a modern liberal democracy controlling non-citizen civilians is the US "unincorporated territories," most notably American Samoa, with a total population of approximately 55,000 people, and total land area of less than 200 square kilometers. This peculiar situation was approved in the US Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit. *Tuaua v. United States* 788 F.3d 300 (D.C. Cir. 2015). That situation is, of course, completely different from Israel's control of the West Bank (excluding east Jerusalem), where the Palestinian population numbers approximate 2.5 million and the total land area is 5,600 square kilometers.
- 9 In the terms used by Feaver in *Armed Servants*, the challenge is shirking by the armed forces.
- 10 Arab political parties in the Israeli *Knesset* do sometimes represent Palestinian interests. However, that situation confers very little political power on Palestinians themselves, especially since the Arab parties in the *Knesset* are small, and never constitute part of a governing coalition.
- 11 HCJ 302/72, 1973.
- 12 HCJ 910/86, 1988.
- 13 Between 1967 and 1986, Palestinians petitioned the ISC less than 600 times. Since the late 1980s, the number has risen to about 200 petitions a year.
Nitza Berkovitz and Neve Gordon show that many of these petitions were either submitted or supported by NGOs. Berkovitz and Gordon, "The Political Economy of Transnational Regimes," *International Studies Quarterly* 52 (2008): 881.
- 14 Yoav Dotan, "Judicial Rhetoric, Government Lawyers and Human Rights: The Case of the Israeli High Court of Justice during the Intifada," *Law & Society Review* 33 (1999): 319–363.
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Amichai Cohen, "Administering the Territories: An Inquiry Into the Application of International Humanitarian Law by the IDF in the Occupied Palestinian Territories," *Israel Law Review* 38 (2005): 24–79.
- 17 HCJ 5973/92, 1993.
- 18 Cohen and Cohen, *Israel's National Security Law*, pp. 156–159.
- 19 HCJ 46/50, 1950.
- 20 HCJ 680/88, 1989.
- 21 Kretzmer, *The Occupation of Justice*, p. 187.
- 22 Based on report of the Israeli General Security Services, "Distribution of Fatalities by Palestinian Terrorism" (Hebrew), May 2008. www.shabak.gov.il.
- 23 "Fatalities Before Operation 'Cast Lead'". *Btselem*. The Israel Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories www.btselem.org/statistics/fatalities/before-cast-lead/by-date-of-event.
- 24 HCJ 51"00/94, 1999.
- 25 Cohen and Cohen, *Israel's National Security Law*, pp. 145–173.
- 26 e.g. Doron Almog, "The West Bank Fence: A Vital Component in Israel's Strategy of Defense," *Policy Focus*, no. 47, Washington, DC: Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2004.
- 27 Shaul Arieli and Michael Sfar, *The Wall of Folly* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Yediyot, 2008.
- 28 HCJ 2056/04, 2004.
- 29 HCJ 3799/02, 2005.
- 30 HCJ 73/53, 1953.
- 31 Ilan Saban, "The Impact of the Supreme Court on the Status of the Arabs in Israel" (Hebrew), *Mishpat u-Mimshal* 3 (1996): 541–569.
- 32 HCJ 4541/94, 1995.
- 33 HCJ 1284/99, 1999.
- 34 Daphna Barak-Erez, "The Feminist Battle for Citizenship: Between Combat Duties and Conscientious Objection," *Cardozo Journal of Law and Gender* 13 (2007): 531–560.
- 35 See Kampinsky, *By Order of the Rabbinate*, Chapter 7.
- 36 HCJ 3267/97, 1998.
- 37 HCJ 6298/07, 2012.
- 38 Ayelet Shaked, "Routes Towards Governance" (Hebrew), *Hashiloach* 1 (2016): 38–55.
- 39 The "Duty of Disclosure of an Institution Supported by a Foreign Entity Act" (2011) requires all NGOs supported by a

foreign entity to file a special report, and those that receive most of their budget from a foreign entity to record that fact in every published report, advertisement or letter to officials.

- 40 *Proposal for the Amendment of Basic Law: The Judiciary* (Limitations on the Right of Standing), Israel Ministry of Justice, 2017.
- 41 Sarah Levy, "Education Ministry Cancels Participation in ACRI Conference," *Jerusalem Post*, November 29, 2017. www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Education-Ministry-cancels-participation-in-ACRI-conference-515512.
- 42 HCJ 3429/11, 2012.
- 43 HCJ 466/07, 2012. The Court accepted the Government's contention that such "family unifications" represented a security risk.
- 44 HCJ 5239/11, 2015.
- 45 Shai Dothan, *Reputation and Judicial Tactics: A Theory of National and International Courts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp. 204–205.
- 46 Amichai Cohen and Guy Harpaz, "Judicial Review of House Demolitions in the Israeli Supreme Court" (Hebrew), *Mishpat u-Mimshal* 19, 2018. http://law.haifa.ac.il/images/lawGov/Amichai%20Cohen_Guy%20Harpaz.pdf
- 47 HCJ 9949/08, 2014. However, it took the Court six years to issue the order, which allowed the state two years of grace before compliance.
- 48 HCJ14/18977, 2017.
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10

Security narratives in Israeli literature

Uri S. Cohen

Israeli literature, born in war, can be read as a security narrative telling the story of Jewish power, its attainment and consolidation. The present chapter traces the origins and evolution of that security narrative while also focusing attention on voices of dissent that sought from an early stage in Israel's history to challenge the hegemony of what is here termed "the Security Style" in the nation's literary canon.¹

Origins

Modern Hebrew literature roughly begins with the rise of political Zionism, accompanying the Zionist idea from vision to reality. During the course of that journey, Hebrew literary culture became preoccupied with the search for power and the fashioning of a protagonist capable of both bearing arms and sustaining a security narrative. Conditions for the emergence of such a theme presented themselves towards the end of the 1930s as Jews in Mandatory Palestine began to experience a decade of war, commencing with the Arab Revolt (1936–1939) and ending with the creation of the State of Israel in 1948.

During this period, the Jewish community (*Yishuv*) began to develop an extensive security apparatus, within which the Security Style and Hebrew culture then emerging became deeply embedded. Its distinct figurative and narrative form did not merely reflect the objective reality of military conflict. It also shaped the image of future conflict. Security became the principal subject of cultural activity, while men who combined sensitive tendencies with a personal background in security affairs came to serve as the voice and face of the nation – a nation for which "security" was an existential problem.

This distinct security style dominated Hebrew culture from the 1930s until the mid-1970s. Even though its influence thereafter waned, this style continues to play a role in contemporary Israeli literary and artistic forms.

The poet Natan Alterman (1910–1970) personifies the embodiment of this Security Style. In three major collections (the titles of which translate as: *Stars Outside* [1938], *Joy of the Poor* [1941], and *Plague Poems* [1944]),² Alterman crafted and gave voice to the emotional world of the pre-State generation of Hebrew youth in Palestine who considered themselves pre-ordained to fight for the future of their people. Armed with historical perspective and a sure-handed sense of destiny, Alterman taught these young men and women how to live, die and kill in war. He

began to be a major voice in the mid-1930s and retained his status until the mid-1950s, when a generational shift in culture rendered him no longer fashionable. Even so, the State of Israel has acknowledged Alterman in different ways; his writings continue to permeate much of its official cultural activity, both in school curricula and in the IDF's educational programming.

Although Alterman thus articulated the Security Style, he was not solely responsible for its creation. It emerged, rather, out of a meeting between two contrasting formative military experiences in *Yishuv* history during World War II. One was enrolment in voluntary militias (the most emblematic being the *Palmach*); the other was service in the British regular army.

Once established in May 1948, the IDF largely drew on the professional military expertise of the 30,000 veterans of the British army. However, its dominant cultural influence was that of the *Palmach*. Originally created by the British in 1942 as a guerrilla force designated to fight behind the lines in the event General Rommel's forces actually invaded Palestine, the *Palmach* was retained by the *Yishuv* leadership as a standing militia even after the German threat had receded.

Truth be told, *Palmach* leaders often spent more of their time writing than fighting. But this was somewhat beneficial since their writings ended up exerting enormous cultural influence. Thanks to their efforts, stories about the *Palmach* and its wartime exploits came to signify identification with both the nation and the land of Israel. Those cultural figures that emerged from the *Palmach* experience, such as Dan Ben Amotz (1924–1989) and Shaike Ophir (1928–1987), also became Israel's first cultural heroes. On a very basic level, the *Palmach* narrative meant growing up in the land and working its fields, conspiring against the British during the final years of the Mandate and then heroically defending a seemingly hopeless position in the face of impossible odds in the War of Independence. Not only did this narrative help to refute accusations that the *Yishuv* in Palestine had been part of an imperial colonial plot, but it also provided a model for new immigrants who, like many of the *Palmach*'s own members, were born in other countries they wanted to forget.

The end of World War II and publication of the enormity of the Holocaust³ added a further strand. The British were now perceived as enemies of the *Yishuv*, foreign occupiers against whom the Jews were waging a liberation struggle, one that at the time was necessarily clandestine. This motif was especially (but not exclusively) prominent in the writings of the smaller, more activist underground militias: ETZEL (the acronym of *Irgun Tzevah Le'umi* [National Military Organization]) and LEHI (*Lohamei Herut Yisrael* [Fighters for the Freedom of Israel; dubbed by the British "The Stern Gang"]).⁴ Although what became known as "the era of the underground" lasted for only three years, from 1945 until 1948, tales about exploits then undertaken earned a privileged space in the literature of the period, and subsequently in official versions of Zionist history. So much was this so, that participation in the underground experience became a *rite de passage* and a prerequisite for having a voice in shaping the emerging "Israeli" culture.

Major writers of this underground period, such as Moshe Shamir (1921–2004), Natan Shacham (b. 1925) and Yigal Mossinson (1917–1994), were also the first authors to publish after the establishment of the State. Unsurprisingly, their narratives focus on the pre-State underground and on their own personal experiences. The fictional or semi-fictional characters they portray in their writings represented the first generation of Hebrew youth. Born and raised in the land by early Zionist immigrant parents, members of that generation fought against the British in a struggle in which the underground operative is a dominant figure. Being part of that secret underground, even in a marginal role, created a powerful sense of social cohesion within the *Yishuv*. Hence, the earliest Israeli security narratives were engrained in a culture that actively

mobilized the cream of its youth for war, and in a society that, because it did not yet possess formal political independence, had to rely for recruitment on persuasion and the promise of social capital.

Moshe Shamir is a central figure in this formative period. The most important writer of the era, he published a series of works between 1947 and 1957 that in effect served to define the culture of the nascent state. The first of these was *He Walked in the Fields* (1947),⁵ a title borrowed from Alterman's poetry. Even though written and published before the 1948 War (indeed, it is set in 1944 and its principal security concern is with the struggle not against the Arabs but against continued British rule in Palestine), this novel deserves to be considered Israel's very first "security narrative."

Its protagonist is Uri, the first child to be born on his kibbutz, who has returned from agricultural school and is considering his future when he falls in love with Mika, a young Holocaust survivor, who becomes pregnant by him. Uri's father is serving in the British Army and Uri has to choose between a domesticated life and the call of the underground, to which he ultimately succumbs, only to then be killed in a military operation before Mika gives birth to his son. *He Walked in the Fields* was immensely popular, and became even more relevant to Hebrew-reading audiences in January 1948 when Eliyahu, Moshe Shamir's own brother and the model for the fictional Uri, was killed while escorting a Jewish convoy through an Arab neighborhood near Tel-Aviv.

Shamir was by then already one of the *Yishuv's* central cultural figures and editor of the new and influential military journal *Bamachaneh* ("In the Camp"). Immediately after his brother's death, he began work on *With His Own Hands*, parts of which were published within a year.⁶ When the complete book appeared in 1951, it was credited with giving artistic depth to an entire genre of commemorative literature narrating the story of the infant state's young men and women, whose deaths in battle Alterman had in December 1947 depicted as the "silver platter" on which Israel had been presented to the Jewish people.⁷ *With His Own Hands* also tells the story of Uri, but this time in the guise of Elik, Moshe Shamir's brother. Here, again, the process is one of realistically claiming an abstract figure who is transformed into a national allegory and endowed with the authority of the fallen. The tale of Uri's involvement in the pre-state underground is seamlessly integrated with the story of the 1948 War of Independence in a way that conflates all the different aspects of that conflict into the image of the brave youngsters going out to protect the *Yishuv* "with only a khaki shirt separating the bullet from the heart." Elik is killed by Arabs, but most of the blame is attributed to the British who did not allow him or his people to properly arm and defend themselves.

The War of Independence and its reverberations

When Hebrew literature abruptly became Israeli literature in 1948, war made it so. In numerous works, the dominant theme became the War of Independence and the brave young men and women who fought and died during its course. It was their personal lives and internal struggles that so many authors sought to lay bare.

Efforts at literary commemoration of the war were widespread, so much so that the genre tended to dominate the entire first decade of Israeli literature, with memorial books and rites playing a central role. Shaping perceptions and memories of the 1948 War assumed centrality in the newly born country's national narrative, itself constructed around the figures of Elik and his

comrades-in-arms. Dominating this literature is the framing of the conflict with the Arabs as a just and defensive war, one waged by the few against the many, and against a backcloth of eternal enmity on the part of both the Arabs and the British toward the Zionist enterprise.

In reality, however, the history of the War of Independence is considerably more complex. Briefly summarized, it actually consisted of two very different conflicts. The first, which began in earnest late in November 1947 (when the United Nations voted to partition Palestine), and lasted until 15 May 1948, when the British mandate terminated, was fought by Jewish militias. Only thereafter did it convert into a war fought by a more conventional army-in-the-making.

Some of the literature of the period contains traces of these two distinct narratives, and almost immediately upon Israel's founding, changes in both style and subject became apparent. Hushed, indirect references to "underground secrets" harbored within Jewish society transmute into an almost desolate and desperate acknowledgement of war's stark realism. The literary face of the Arab enemy changes, too. As was the case during the immediate pre-State period, the enemy remains local, and villages destroyed during the course of the fighting are sites with which the Jewish combatants were well acquainted.⁸ In general, however, "the enemy" now becomes less specific, less intimate and less knowable.

One author who famously dissented from the predominant security narrative of this period – and did so with specific reference to the Arab victims of the conflict – was S. Yizhar (Yizhar Smilansky; 1916–2006), who devoted two of his early works to this subject: *The Prisoner* and *Khirbet Khizeh* (the two stories were originally published in a single set of covers).⁹ *The Prisoner* recounts the useless capture and subsequent interrogation of a local Arab shepherd and introduces the reader to a narrator who lives in constant agony over what is perpetrated in the name of the State and what the Jewish army is becoming. The discrepancy between the military apparatus of the Israeli army and the ignorance of the local Arab shepherd is almost too much to bear. Even if released at some future time, he no longer has a present. Merely referred to as a prisoner of war, he possesses no country and his fate is sealed. The point is brought home even more explicitly in *Khirbet Khizeh*, which tells the story of the destruction of an Arab village and how its inhabitants go into exile – a term carrying clear connotations of the Jewish people's own Diaspora fate.

Both of Yizhar's stories are written in a very direct and effective style, only intermittently digressing into the author's particularly detailed and highly poetic descriptions of the landscape. Similarly, both relate how Israeli soldiers are disturbing age-old harmonies, ruining the biblical semblance of the Holy Land. So, too, in both narratives the narrator's dissent is internalized, with the entire action unfolding through his vehement inner monologue with himself that results in the end in passivity, inaction. Yizhar's writings thus lay the groundwork for a form of dissent that decades later would come to characterize the left wing on the Israeli political spectrum. Designated "shooting and weeping," it would couple steadfast military service as a national duty with personal conscientious protest against its consequences.

In the shadow of Israel's protracted "border wars"

The writers who came of age during the first decade of statehood confronted a cultural landscape dominated not only by commemoration of the War of Independence but also by the consequences of a new and protracted series of "border wars."¹⁰ These had commenced when Israeli forces first operated offensively across the international frontier in December 1948 and

continued, intermittently, until (in collusion with the British and French) the IDF attacked Egyptian formations in the Sinai in October 1956.

These lower-intensity border wars were characterized by an escalatory cycle of violence usually triggered by irregular Arab “infiltrations,” many perpetrated by dispossessed Palestinian villagers seeking to recover their property and livestock; others, by bands of trained fighters seeking to sow terror among Jews. Incursions were invariably followed by Israeli military “reprisal raids,” several of which also inflicted considerable damage on civilian targets.

Official Israeli government and media sources portrayed the reprisal raids as acts of retribution: a term designed to suggest that, although the resort to force was motivated by a past injury that required addressing, its immediate objective was enforcing minimal stability achievable only through the deterrent effect of reprisal. But that rhetorical device masked another facet of the reprisal raids, for they also appeared to be deliberate acts of revenge aimed at perpetuating as well as stabilizing Palestinian defeat. Carried out by special militia-like units (of which the most famous was “Unit 101” of the IDF Paratroop Brigade), their commander, Ariel Sharon, attained mythological status in the pantheon of Israel’s security culture. So too did the IDF’s Chief of Staff, Moshe Dayan, especially in the wake of the army’s operational successes in the 1956 Sinai campaign, termed Operation *Kadesh*.

In some ways, the cultural reactions to the 1956 war prefigure those that would appear after the even more spectacular victories the IDF attained in 1967. Thus, the conclusion of Operation *Kadesh* saw the publication of “victory albums,” albeit of comparatively modest proportions, containing collections of photographs, press cuttings and literary musings.

Nevertheless, winds of change began to be felt. Alterman’s poetic influence waned, as was indicated by the failure of his monumental collection entitled *Ir Hayonah* (“City of the Dove”), published in 1956. Poetry celebrating the birth of the state in war, which constituted the body of *Ir Hayonah*, now rang hollow, with Alterman’s voice supplanted by those of the generation which had actually participated in the earlier 1948 conflict, most particularly Natan Zach (b. 1930) and Yehuda Amichai (1924–2000). These new poets shifted the literary focus from the collective to the personal, constructing war as a subject of trauma and experience not discourse.¹¹

The new tone became still more marked in the late 1950s. While the security narrative still lay at the core of narrative prose, its noble protagonists and hallowed sacrificial language were now targets for bitter irony. The early short stories written by Amoz Oz (b. 1939), collected in *Where the Jackals Howl* (first published in 1965),¹² typify this shift. His protagonists are always weak, trying to prove a strength they don’t possess while eyeing the natural born killers with a mixture of awe and disdain.

Significantly, this period of border wars also provides the principal temporal setting for Oz’s *My Michael* (published in 1968).¹³ Considered by some critics to be the first truly “Israeli novel” (and certainly one of the most widely read), *My Michael* tells the story of Michael Gonen through the eyes of his wife Hannah, showing how their intricate relationship unfolds against a background of security concerns. Hence, although Oz takes their story down to 1959, it reaches its peak in the *Kadesh* campaign of 1956. The novel has enjoyed enormous domestic and international success precisely because it brings together the two narratives – security and psychological – to the point where they are difficult to tell apart.

The 1956 conflict also serves as the centerpiece of another popular novel, *The Battle*, written by Yariv Ben-Aharon (1934–2016), who had himself participated in *Kadesh* as a young tank commander.¹⁴ Although poorly written and with a simplistic plot, this book ran to six editions –

most probably because it responded to the public's authentic desire to know more about the mystery of battle that is at the heart of war.

More artistically complex works that related to the 1956 War were few in number, and did so only subtly. Apart from their aesthetic value, their significance lies in expressing dissent from the official rhetoric about the war by concentrating on liminal figures and forms of defection. Such is the case, for instance, in *The Man from There* by Yitzhak Ben Ner (born 1937) and *Oded Yarkoni's Private War* by Avraham Raz (1937–1971), both of which are truly complex works.¹⁵

From these and other texts of and about the era, it is clear that the 1956 War had the effect of deeply frustrating cultural proponents of the militia strain in Israel's security culture, who identified a rise to prominence of nationalistic outlooks that often carried religious overtones. Even so, it is important to point out that figures of defection were also prominent in works anchored in the right wing of the contemporary Israeli political spectrum.

One example is *The Gavriel Tirosch Affair* by Yitzhak Shalev (1918–1992).¹⁶ The setting of this novel, first published in 1964, is pre-State Jerusalem, where a charismatic history teacher and five of his pupils form a gang that operates against local Arabs during the 1936–1939 Arab Rebellion. This is one of the first works in Israeli literature to adopt a positive view of violence against civilians and vengeance, and thus departed from the “shooting and weeping” mold. Not incidentally, it has attained a certain cult status in many of the settlements established after 1967 in the West Bank.

The impact of the Six-Day War

Israel's military triumphs during the Six-Day War of June 1967 inaugurated a period of cultural giddiness. Thanks to victory, the Security Style and its protagonists gained dominance not just over the military apparatus but also over all forms of national cultural expression. Immediately after the war ended, bookshops and stalls were flooded with a multitude of “victory albums,” all of which encouraged a mood of security euphoria, plus the conviction that the use of force carries only advantages and hardly any consequences.

Although Israeli literature was somewhat slow to appreciate how fundamentally the Six-Day War was to change Israel and its society, the reaction to the military campaign was almost instantaneous. It took one form in the collection of introspective interviews and discussions conducted after the war among young soldiers, all members of kibbutzim, soon after returning to their homes once the fighting had ceased. The collection was originally entitled *Between Friends* and its distribution was initially restricted to the kibbutz movement, from which all of its editors had come (among them, Amoz Oz and Yariv Ben-Aharon, both mentioned above). Very shortly after its appearance, however, the collection generated such wide public interest that, as a result, it was redacted and reissued in book form as *Siyach Lochaim* (“Soldiers Talk”), becoming a national best-seller that ran to several editions.¹⁷

Due to extensive editing, the full extent of which would only come to light some five decades after the book's first publication, *Soldiers Talk* constituted a peculiar blend of truth and falsehood. On the one hand, it entirely ignored the impetus the Six-Day War had given to messianic and triumphalist sentiments already giving birth to the “Greater Land of Israel” movement. Indeed, transcripts of conversations conducted by the editors with a group of national-religious veterans expressing right-wing sentiments were simply excluded from the published work. On the other hand, however, *Soldiers Talk*, in its printed form, did accurately

reflect the extent to which graduates of the secular kibbutz educational system were committed to humanistic values.

These participants in the conversations expressed repulsion at the resort to violence and painted a picture of an Israel that, in 1967, was still small, modest, overwhelmingly Ashkenazi and imbued with a controlled attitude toward the use of force and power. Given that complexion, it is easy to understand how *Soldiers Talk* was adopted as a basic text by the Israeli peace movement that emerged in the 1970s. Although this had not been the editors' original intention, it was perhaps an inevitable outcome of their denial of vast parts of the land and its inhabitants.¹⁸

Denial, in a somewhat different sense, was also characteristic of wider public attitudes during the War of Attrition fought between Egypt and Israel, principally across the Suez Canal, in 1969 and 1970. In fact, only belatedly was this conflict acknowledged to be a war at all; at the time it was regarded as a series of enemy-initiated skirmishes to which Israel retaliated by escalating the scope of violence. This view hardly squared with the number of casualties the IDF sustained during the course of the fighting: 968 soldiers killed and another 3,730 injured, figures that invited reflection on the mood of euphoria that still persisted in the wake of the Six-Day War.

This is precisely the discrepancy some of the literature of the time began to address. The most important writer to do so was Hanoch Levin (1943–1999), a prolific playwright and director who in the early 1970s, especially, gave voice to a deep form of disaffection with the culture of power and its representatives. Particularly forthright was his satirical play, “Queen of the Bathtub” (*Malkat Ambatyah*, 1970) which mocked Israeli arrogance in a deliberately provocative way. Interestingly, *Queen of the Bathtub* was a flop at the box-office. So virulent were public protests it aroused that the Cameri Theater in Tel-Aviv decided to withdraw the play after only 19 performances. In retrospect, however, that reaction seems to have vindicated Levin's vision of the Israeli security apparatus as a vast childish game sustained by voices who, because bereft of ideas, feel compelled to resort to power.

The trauma of the Yom Kippur War

The sudden outbreak and perilous course of the Yom Kippur War of October 1973 demonstrated that Hanoch Levin's perceptions of reality superseded those of his peers in that the war dealt a devastating blow to the security establishment and to the entire culture that it had fostered. The year 1973 remains to the present a dramatic and even traumatic milestone in collective Israeli biographies. Together with the rise of the right-wing *Likud* party to power in the 1977 elections, it marks the moment at which the old order of things falls apart and rapid changes ensue.

Given this background, it is hardly surprising that the Yom Kippur War would become an important presence and theme in subsequent literature. It made its first major appearance in *The Lover*, published in 1977, the first novel written by A. B. Yehoshua (b. 1936).¹⁹ In both style and content, this work contrasts sharply with Amos Oz's *My Michael*, which, as noted above, had been so popular in the 1960s. *The Lover* relates a protracted search for Gavriel (the eponymous lover of the title), who was conscripted for military service on the first day of the 1973 War but never reached the front. Eventually he is discovered, having defected to a *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) community in Jerusalem. The saga of the search for Gavriel is told through the voices of several characters, one of whom is Naim, a young Israeli-Arab.

Extremely well crafted, although not explicitly allegorical, *The Lover* displays an acute sensitivity to the state of contemporary Israeli society and its complex relationships. Like Israel

as a whole, the family described in the book is falling apart in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, even as it becomes materially affluent. Likewise, looking for Gavriel reflects the traumas induced in real life by the numerous protracted searches that took place after 1973 for soldiers missing in combat or held captive. Particularly noteworthy and almost prophetic is that in Yehoshua's novel the missing lover is found living in a *haredi* community. Following the 1973 war, Israeli society did indeed experience a marked shift towards religion, a motif that would become increasingly prominent in Israeli literature and culture.

The hold the 1973 War has exercised on the Israeli literary imagination is well illustrated in *To the End of the Land*, published some 35 years after the conflict by David Grossman (b. 1954),²⁰ who had himself been a soldier during the war and who had already addressed the topic in several earlier works. The significance of this particular work lies in its massive and complex dismantlement of the Security Style dating back to the *Palmach* era, which had tied literary and high culture to the security narrative and to the IDF and defense establishment. Two central characters in *To the End of the Land* are Ora and Avram, her son's father. Avram is taken captive by the Egyptians during the course of the 1973 fighting, and has never fully recovered from the experience. It is now 2002 and the IDF is involved in yet another operation ("Defensive Shield"). This time Ora's child is in action. Rejecting the role of brave, supportive mother ascribed to her by the original Security Style, and in an attempt to deflect a message about her son's fate she cannot bear to receive, Ora virtually compels Avram to accompany her on a country hike along the Israel Trail. In so doing, she disassembles an entire respected tradition, since for many Israelis hiking the length and breadth of Israel still carries the original meaning imparted by the *Palmach*. Not for Ora, however. What was once an activity that connecting the body to the land becomes in *To the End of the Land* a grieving divorce.

The turn to dystopia

In many ways, *To the End of the Land* marks the culmination of a long mental and literary process. Grossman, a prolific author and novelist who ever since the early 1980s has addressed several major aspects of Israeli life, had throughout engaged the Security Style as both an insider and an objective critic. In this respect, his is the last voice in the tradition of Amos Oz and A. B. Yehoshua, writers who considered Israeli reality deeply national and therefore permanently anchored to the security experience. *To the End of the Land* attempts to dismantle or at least to retell the security narrative, while remaining committed to a refined form of realism.

Other prominent writers of the post-1973 era had more explicitly taken alternative paths, especially when addressing anew Israel's goals and fate. Collectively, this literary turn signified the collapse of the Security Style – a phenomenon clearly influenced not just by the 1973 War but also by the rise to power of Israel's right and a refocusing of the national security narrative. Thanks to the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, the threat of major interstate war against an Arab coalition of countries diminished. Instead, the inter-communal conflict with the Palestinians occupied center stage in the security discourse. This process began with the First Lebanon War of 1982 and accelerated in subsequent years as the specter of violence came closer to home.

Grossman had himself addressed this inward turn, especially in his journalistic masterpiece *The Yellow Wind*, a picture of life in the territories after 20 years of Israeli occupation published just prior to the outbreak of the first Palestinian *intifada* in December 1987.²¹ In the hands of other authors, however, the post-1973 era induced the emergence of a dystopian and apocalyptic

genre in Hebrew literature. Its first exponent was Amos Keinan (1927–2009), who in his youth had been a member of the LEHI underground movement, had fought in the 1948 War (he was present on April 9 1948 at Dir Yassin, an Arab village whose inhabitants were massacred by LEHI fighters) and had subsequently become a major left-wing journalist. In 1975, Keinan published *Shoah II*, a military based dystopia set in a Kafkaesque camp ruled by a Japanese officer.²²

There followed, almost a decade later, *The Road to Ein Harod*,²³ another powerful dystopia that portrayed an Israel in the grip of a civil war following a military coup. In this work, as in the majority of Hebrew-language dystopias, the injustice committed against the Palestinians is the root cause of the imagined descent into chaos. When the protagonist, Rafi, does finally attain his objective and reaches Kibbutz Ein Harod in the Jezreel Valley (the site, in earlier ages, of both a crusader castle and Arab village), he realizes that all his life he has fought for misguided ideals. The crime for which he is punished is, in Keinan's account, the forcible conquest of Arab homes and lands.

The politics of dystopia seem clear. The waning of the secular Ashkenazi elite in Hebrew literature is expressed in dire warnings about the future extrapolated from a combination of the present and what we know about the past. This is also part of the artistic achievement of *The Third*, a novel more recently published by Yishai Sarid (b. 1965).²⁴ Sarid's is a unique voice in current Israeli literature in that he is a superb craftsman. *The Third* is so powerful because it is at once both an imaginary utopia and a dystopian, apocalyptic and "last survivor" tale.

It tells of the third temple, built by the narrator's father, a messianic leader whose arrival follows annihilation of the cities of the shore. Implementation of the idea to construct the temple produces awful consequences: a bloodbath; a constant stream of excrement and guts; a country devastated, defeated and emptied of all that was once good. Even nuclear power is not capable of saving its inhabitants. Neither, even more emphatically, does divine intervention. In Sarid's hands, then, the security narrative turns into something entirely negative, with Israel ultimately defeated by its perpetual Middle East conflict.

It is not by chance that the discussion thus far has been restricted to male authors. As a rule, women were customarily relegated to the fringes of the traditional security narrative. For most of the period under discussion, they represented objects of desire from the male protagonist's often possessive point of view. Always on the margin of action, they are vividly present only as real but also abstract objects of longing and desire. Love, and the girls that deserve it, are not so much the spoils of victory as consolation prizes for defeat, which is the fate of every soldier who goes to war. Though women such as Yehudit Hendel (1921–2014), Amalia Kahana-Carmon (b. 1926) and Netiva Ben-Yehuda (1928–2011) wrote important works within the Security Style, their stories often contain traces of the violent emotional landscape that characterizes it, hidden in plain sight. Viewed from a contemporary perspective, these traces allow us to view women under the physical and emotional strain of a marked masculine security culture. Only in the 1980s, as the Security Style loses its grip on society, do female writers come to the fore of Hebrew literature, bringing with them a radically different perspective, anchored in motherhood.

Orly Castel-Bloom (b. 1960) is a shining example of that contribution. Since beginning her writing in the mid-1980s, she has made abundant use of various forms of speculative poetics, thereby revolutionizing contemporary Hebrew literature in a series of powerful short stories and novels. These culminated in *Dolly City*, published in 1992,²⁵ which today still remains an exemplar of a narrative that leaves no security stone unturned while striving for a different if undefined form and style of literature. In this novel, which tells a weird and wild story about a

woman and the child she finds and mothers, Castel-Bloom chews up and cheerfully spits out a tirade against military language and manners.

Consequently, *Dolly City* creates a new, fragmented, eco-scientific form of dystopia, whose linguistic and figurative fabric continuously denies and resuscitates allegorical possibilities. The kind of voice and point of view Castel-Bloom brings to culture constantly works against the traditional structures of representation. The security narrative almost falls apart, though the reality of conflict persists, shifting attention to pain written in the body. Castel-Bloom does not so much subvert the security narrative as rip it apart from an emotional and poetic point of view. Her argument is not political in any conventional sense but rather pushes the entire focal point and scope of Hebrew literature towards openness to new imagined pasts and futures.

Demise

When analyzed as a security narrative, by the seventh decade of Israel's history its literature has become mostly a story of collective failure and national trauma, especially as many of the security narratives move to artistically more simple forms of propaganda and doctrine. Literary culture in recent years has proved weak in the face of official discourse intent on preserving and disseminating the sense of justice inherent in the original views of the security style. Literary and artistic representations of the security narrative, and their radical views, have grown progressively more alien to a large swath of Israeli society. Despite growing alienation, literature continues to evolve as the enemy himself has become hard to identify. Conflict has turned internal rather than external, fought inside the country even more than along its borders.

From this perspective, modern Israeli Hebrew literature as art has turned its back on the societal sector that justifies war, and that segment of society has largely returned the favor. Etgar Keret (b. 1967), one of the most talented writers to emerge since the 1990s, has written beautifully and cleverly on the origins of this malaise in a short story, "Cocked and Locked," published in his second book *Missing Kissinger*.²⁶ This story describes a fully armed Israeli soldier on guard duty who finds himself taking verbal abuse from a Palestinian rioter.

At the close of the tale, the soldier hides his face behind his bandages and throws his gun at the Palestinian in the hope he will take it and realize what a useless piece of metal it is. Poised at the end of a long historical process converting the eternally abused Diaspora Jew into a power-wielding Israeli, the representative soldier now discards his weapon, wishing to become once again the freedom fighter. A person waging a fight for freedom with the confidence and free spirit that can only come from knowing one is truly on the right side of a just war.

Notes

- 1 For a fuller discussion see my: *The Security Style and the Hebrew War Culture* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 2017.
- 2 Respectively: *Kokhavim Ba-Chutz*. Tel Aviv: Yachdav, 1938; *Simchat Aniyim*. Tel-Aviv: Machbarot le-Sifrut, 1941; and *Shirei Makot Mitzrayim*. Tel-Aviv: Machbarot le-Sifrut, 1944.
- 3 Awareness of the enormity of the Holocaust entered Hebrew literary consciousness with the publication soon after the end of the war of a memoir by an Auschwitz survivor, Yechiel Ben-Dor (1909–2001), who used the nom de plume "Ka. Chetnik 135663." His book was entitled *Salamandra: Khrionika shel Mishpachah Yehudit be-Me'ah ha-Esrim*. Tel-Aviv: Dvir, 1946. It was translated as *Sunrise Over Hell*. New York: Virgin, 1977.
- 4 See: Joseph Heller, *The Stern Gang: Ideology, Politics and Terror 1940–1949*. London: Routledge, 2015.
- 5 *Hu Halakh Ba-ssadot*. Merchaviya: Sifriyat Poalim, 1947.
- 6 *Be-Mo Yadav: Pirkeu Alik*. Merchaviya: Sifriyat Poalim, 1951. English translation by Joseph Shachter. Jerusalem: The

Institute for the Translation of Hebrew Literature, 1970.

- 7 Yael S. Feldman, *Glory and Agony Isaac's Sacrifice and National Narrative*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010, p. 145. As Feldman points out, the phrase, which served as the title for one of Alterman's most famous poems, concretized a saying attributed to Chaim Weizmann, Israel's first president: "No people is handed a state on a silver platter." *Ibid.*, p. 370, n. 38.
- 8 Thus, in a story that Yigal Mossinson published in 1948, vengeance is taken against a specific person, known to the perpetrators as a neighbor. Mi Amar She-hu Shaḥor, *Who Said He's Black*. Merḥaviyah: Sifriyat Poalim, 1948.
- 9 S. Yizhar, *Sipur Khirbet Khizeh*. Merchaviya: Sifriyat Poalim, 1949. English translation, under the same title, by Nicholas de Lange and Yaacob Dwek. Jerusalem: Ibis, 2008.
- 10 The term derives from Benny Morris, *Israel's Border Wars 1949–1956*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.
- 11 The process is discussed in Michael Gluzman, *Shirat Hatvu'im* ("Poetry of Drowning: The Melancholy of Sovereignty in the Poetry of the 1950s and 1960s"). Haifa: Haifa University Press, 2018.
- 12 *Artzot Ha-Tan*. Tel-Aviv: Masada, 1965. English translation by Nicolas de Lange and Philip Simson. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.
- 13 *Michael Sheli*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved 1968. English translation by Nicolas de Lange. London: Chatto & Windus, 1972.
- 14 *Ha-Krav*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1966.
- 15 Respectively, *Ha-Ish Mi-Sham*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1967 and *Parshat Hamilkhamah shel Oded Yarkoni*. Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad, 1977. See Dalia Rabikovitich (ed.), *The New Israeli Writers: Short Stories of the First Generation*. New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1969, pp. 129–172.
- 16 *Parashat Gavri'el Tirosh*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1964.
- 17 Avraham Shapira (ed.), *Siah Lohamim: Pirkei Hakshavah ve-Hitbonenut*. Tel-Aviv: The Kibbutz Movement, 1968. A selection of materials from the book, translated by Henry Near, was published as *The Seventh Day: Soldiers Talk About the Six-Day War*. New York: Scribner, 1970.
- 18 Yitzhak Laor, *The Myths of Liberal Zionism*. New York: Verso, 2009.
- 19 *Ha-Me'ahev*. Jerusalem: Schocken, 1977. English translation by Philip Simpson. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1978.
- 20 *Isha Borachat Mibesorah*. Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad. English translation by Jessica Cohen. New York: Random House, 2010.
- 21 *Ha-Zeman Ha-Tzahov*. Tel-Aviv: Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Meuchad, 1987. English translation by Haim Waxman. New York: Vintage, 1988.
- 22 Published under that title as a special edition by "A.L.," Tel-Aviv.
- 23 *Ha-Derekh le-Ein Harod*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1984.
- 24 *Ha-Shelishi*. Tel-Aviv: Am Oved.
- 25 First published by Zmora-Bitan. Tel-Aviv, 1992. English translation, under the same title, by Daliya Bilu. Champaign, IL: Dalkey Archive Press, 2010.
- 26 *Ga'aguai le-Kissinger*. Tel-Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1994.

11

Security narratives in Israeli dramatic arts

Tali Silberstein

For individual Israelis, soldiering is very personal. When also viewed at the national level, military service assumes the character of an integral if not central part of Israeli education, culture and consciousness. To describe Israel as “a nation in arms” or as “a people in uniform”¹ underscores a process whereby the personal and the collective come together to establish a truly unique relationship between the individual soldier and Israel’s premier socializing agency, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

The army experience is central to one’s individual’s identity, and the individual in turn embodies the army as a social institution. It is in this dual context that the depiction in theater and on film of Israeli soldiers as dramatic characters assumes such significance. These two media, each in its distinctive way, encourage self-introspection while at the same time enabling foreign non-Israeli viewers to form their own impressions.

The dramatic character

Questions of identity

In both theater and film the human character is a central concern. Theater, it has been noted, “is the paradigmatic mimetic art” where “together the audience and the actors engage in incarnate imaginative variation on the meaning of human being and doing.”² In a similar way,

human expressivity can be so striking in the cinema; the cinema does not give us people’s thoughts, as the novel has long done, instead, it gives us their behavior, their special way of being in the world, their manner of dealing with things and with each other.³

Hence, changes in artistic, philosophical and social perceptions in any given period and within different contexts will strongly influence how dramatic characters are depicted and observed, and how they evolve over time.

Applying this conceptual framework to the Israeli dramatic character in theater and film alerts us to the country’s distinctive social and cultural environment. On the one hand, stage and screen depictions mirror the constant campaign aimed at merging different sub-cultural phenomena into one dominant culture. On the other hand, they are emblematic of a society in unending conflict,

internal as well as external, and struggling with an overall existential uncertainty. Consequently, efforts at establishing a well-defined identity, or “character,” are a source of overwhelming tension that strongly impacts in turn on artistic endeavors. Given their special place in the social fabric of Israel, particularly is this so when the portrait is of IDF soldiers.

The Israeli soldier – a brief history of a dramatic character

The Israeli soldier first makes a dramatic appearance in three plays set during Israel’s War of Independence, all of which depict Hebrew combatants and their heroic fight for statehood: *He Walked through the Fields* (Moshe Shamir, 1948), *In the Negev Plains* (Yigal Mossinson, 1949), and *They Will Arrive Tomorrow* (Nathan Shaham, 1950). Israeli cinema of the same period (such as it was) produced no significant body of films with soldiers as their main protagonists.

That situation changed during the 1960s when, with the growth of Israeli cinema, the number of films depicting soldiers rose, still mostly against the backdrop of the War of Independence. Focusing on the heroic character-type became more pronounced following the 1967 Six-Day War, reflecting the increased glorification of the army and its soldiers. One prominent example is the cinematic version of *He Walked Through the Fields*, released soon after the war.

Interestingly, throughout the 1950s–1960s the Israeli soldier as a character-type was almost entirely absent from the stage. The accepted explanation for this phenomenon is that Israeli audiences of the time craved “normalization,” and Israel’s “unique political situation” mandated avoiding any threat to the national consensus.⁴

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, Israeli theater evinced signs of dissent.⁵ The challenge to the accepted consensus – which turned out to be temporary and limited – was most infamously exhibited in Hanoach Levin’s cabaret plays *You, Me and the Next War* (1968) and *Queen of the Bathtub* (1970). Although neither production remained on stage for long, Levin’s unflinching representation of Israel’s militarism is unprecedented, and by virtue of its very uniqueness remains influential.

Israeli cinema offered the most meaningful response to the 1967 and 1973 Wars and to the new reality of military occupation over the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. A cluster of films made in the 1970s–1980s – part of “The New Personal Cinema,” which Judd Ne’eman, an Israeli film director and scholar, termed “The New Sensitivity” – subjected the Israeli soldier and the military establishment to critical inspection. This was done by provoking questions regarding consensual ideals such as conscription, training methods and treatment of soldiers by commanders, the brotherhood of arms and the overall impact of being a soldier. Thereafter, neither the IDF nor the individual soldier would be cast in a necessarily heroic light.

In the latter half of the 1980s, cinematic themes concerning military service began to address highly contentious political issues, especially the experience of having to serve in the disputed Palestinian territories. However, during the 1990s, led by a new generation and motivated by a different agenda, Israeli cinema made a conscious and determined effort to get as far away as possible from the spirit of the former decade. The pendulum swung back again in the 2000s, during which almost every year saw at least one film concentrating on characters of soldiers.

Israeli theater went through a different process: in the 1980s, controversial themes and characters made only rare appearances, mostly in fringe theater and to strong public disapproval.⁶ Yet even this limited inclination faded rapidly after 1993, the year of the Oslo accord and peace process that generated optimism as well as domestic tension. Today, mainstream theater still generally avoids these sensitive and divisive subjects, while fringe

theater accords them some prominence.

This brief review leads to several interim conclusions. First, the Israeli soldier's dramatic presence is forever changing in response to the country's cultural, political and ideological mood shifts. Second, the two dramatic media, theater and film, tend to alternate in representations of the military character: when one medium de-emphasizes, the other highlights. The overall effect though is that, in one way or another, the character and conduct of the Israeli soldier are almost ever-present in Israeli works of drama.

The commander: representation, preservation and change

Expanding upon these two conclusions,⁷ this chapter examines the type of military roles and IDF hierarchy attached to soldiers as protagonists in the 70 years of Israeli drama. The question of representation is not only that of appearance but of characterization: in what way and to what extent does the evolvment of this dramatic character relate to relevant periodical trends and to the gradual consolidation of our collective "face"?

Brothers in arms – the age of the comrade–commander

The idealized image of the Israeli fighting hero at the time of his emergence in Israel's collective consciousness was triple-layered: he was a "*sabra*" (Israeli-born), a "*Palmachnik*" (member of the pre-state voluntary paramilitary) and a field commander. Voluntarism and informality were considered this arch-typical character's two main attributes. The "true" fighter always volunteered for duty and even as a commander remained close to his soldiers. First among equals, he was conceived more as group leader than commanding officer. As Oz Almog observes:

The character of the commander fulfilled the need of a revolutionary society for role models, for normative 'beacons.' Commanders who served as personal examples in their professionalism and patriotic devotion, who ran ahead and consolidated the ranks, were models of excellence and were perceived as the envoys of the nation.⁸

Consequently, the fate of Uri Kahana, the protagonist of Moshe Shamir's 1948 seminal play *He Walked Through the Fields* ("*Hu Halach ba-Sadot*"), is designed along these lines. When called to arms, he is actually in the midst of a non-military career path, having just moved into a tent with his girlfriend, Mika, and is planning life with her in his kibbutz. Symbolically, however, their tent occupies only a small space on the stage, suggesting its insignificance in the great, dramatic struggle for independence.

"One day *the guys* are called – and *I'm* out again," explains Uri. The collective and the individual are one, thereby determining Uri's position as a soldier, and especially as a platoon commander. "*In my role*," he tells Mika, "father, mother, relatives, family – it's all nice and good as long as it doesn't get in the way," forcing her to conclude that Uri "does not belong to himself right now."

Thus is foreshadowed Uri's sacrificial end. Dramatizing his fatal and wordless decision to act, in the play he cocks his weapon (in the later film version he takes off his combat belt and exits the frame), going off on his own to blow up a bridge, a dangerous mission from which he does

not return. As one commentator notes, “The tragic law is embedded in Uri’s character ... Due to his commanding post, he did not have to take the risk ... but he did make this decision.”⁹ Paradoxically, Uri uses his prerogative as commander in order to relinquish his privilege as one. Writing in 2012, Odeya Kohen-Raz sees in Uri’s actions evidence of professionalism;¹⁰ but in the spirit of 1948 they may be more accurately conceived as ideologically inevitable rather than professionally balanced.

This spirit changed fundamentally in the 1950s as the IDF became more established, a process accompanied by three major developments relevant to our discussion: formalization, militarization and professionalization. Concomitantly, official military rank became the key to social prestige; military service became a desired experience in its own right rather than a national calling; and professional achievement became just as important a consideration as any other, including ideology.¹¹

That this change in military culture was not easily accepted is reflected in Nathan Shaham’s 1950 play *They Will Arrive Tomorrow* (“*Hem Yagi’u Machar*”). Still relating to the ’48 war, this play focuses on two alternative commanding personae: Avi and Jonah, who – like Uri Kahana – are platoon commanders. The two protagonists are ordered to occupy a targeted hill, but because that objective has been heavily mined by other Israeli forces, and they lack a map of the minefield, they are unable to advance or retreat. The experience of being pinned down amid your own detonating mines serves as the thematic framework for this allegorical–existential play.

The play is structured around a heated ongoing debate between Avi and Jonah. Avi professes belief in the traditional pre-state spirit of volunteerism and the free choice of his soldiers, as opposed to blind obedience, and in comradeship. Jonah, by contrast, puts his trust in chain-of-command, in formal orders and in strictly military reasoning. While Avi sees their approaching end as a blind, shared outcome for everyone trapped on the hill, including the commanding officers, Jonah complains that “damn fate” thrusts upon him, as commander, sole responsibility “to consider that we are nothing but a small unimportant detail in a big plan.”

Avi fulfills the ethos of the commander who shouts “follow me!” rather than “forward!”: “This is how I understand my role, going in front, not behind.” Avi leads, Jonah orders: “A commander should be where a commander should be. Sometimes it’s in front; sometimes it’s in a safe hole, near a portable phone.” Their debate conveys contrasting perspectives. Avi defines his position by personal relations with his men; Jonah, by the needs of command performance in a given specific mission.

These two opposing characters represent the passage from pre-state to state. For Jonah, the military phase constitutes an integral part of his identity. Accordingly, he plans to remain in service and become a professional soldier. Avi, by contrast, intends to return to civilian life after this passing interlude. Shaham has Avi say: “for me ... *people are not judged by their rank and status*, but by one principle: who will precede me in a minefield and who will trick me into walking behind me.” Shaham himself was wary of a future as represented by Jonah:

What will tomorrow bring, when we are not shot at, when we have to deal with the mines of our lives, in a different situation of ‘survival,’ when it is not team effort which improves our position, but when one gains from the ruin of his fellowman?¹²

In truth, the principal idea behind the play is that these two commanding figures are really two parts of a single whole – “two opposing poles in one character.”¹³ Shaham presents leadership as a multifaceted institution rather than a personal phenomenon, expressing it in the words of his

alter ego, Avi, to his supposed antagonist, Jonah: “You and I are the command ... the command. It’s already an institution.”

After the 1948 War of Independence, the 1967 War is the most prominent event in Israel’s history. The euphoric response to its stunning military victory strengthened pre-existing inclinations toward hubris, self-reliance and securitization. In direct response, the public image and popularity of the army’s commanding ranks soared considerably, but the passage of time plus the cumulative effect of military government over the West Bank and Gaza began to take a toll on Israel’s self-image as a brave “David,” finding itself instead in the unaccustomed role of “Goliath.”¹⁴

Tzachik, the protagonist of Avraham Raz’s 1968 play *Not by Day and Not by Night* (“*Lo ba-Yom velo ba-Layla*”) struggles with a personal sense of duality foreshadowing the communal one. Also cast as a platoon commander, but injured during the 1967 fighting and now hospitalized, he is gradually succumbing to blindness: “I had eighteen soldiers in the palm of my hand, and a command from me was everything to them ... Their lives depended on this little finger, and here I need permission to switch on a radio.” Tzachik has lost not only his sight, but also his vocation, authority and independence. Altogether, the play is saturated with juxtapositions and interchanges between young and old, masculinity and femininity, blindness and vision, commanding and obeying, potent authority and impotent dependency.

The main dramatic conflict in the play is between Tzachik and Sokolova, an aged female teacher he meets in the hospital ward. Because of her failing eyesight, Sokolova believes Tzachik is Sender, the long-lost love of her youth. Sender is a relic of the good old days, the perfect image of the mythical pioneer from the pre-state era. Associating Tzachik with Sender represents a double passing: of the Sender character, who is no longer part of reality but virtual and illusory, and of the Tzachik character, damaged and falling apart. Arguably, a third loss is that of the clearly delineated, classically formatted character of the soldier–commander of previous plays.

The duality experienced after the Six-Day War became a pronounced internal conflict following the 1973 Yom Kippur War – one Israel technically may have won, but at a staggering price in casualties and in self-confidence. Among other phenomena, a gap arose between the focus on security issues and the IDF’s status, when public criticism of senior commanders scaled unprecedented heights. At the same time, officers of all ranks assumed positions of leadership in both formal political parties as well as in extra-parliamentary protest movements.¹⁵

Judd Ne’eman’s 1977 film *Paratroopers* (“*Masa Alunkot*”) emphasizes the complex relationship existing in the segmented and hierarchical military world between soldiers in basic training, who are subordinates, and the commanding officers, who are their absolute rulers. This stratification expresses itself throughout the film in different cinematic methods: composition, which involves creating visual layers and divisions of frame reflecting different social standings; the *mise-en-scène*, contrasting the power of certain characters against the helplessness of others; the use of lighting with certain characters and so forth. In a twist of *They Will Arrive Tomorrow*, the fate of the soldiers lies completely in the hands of untrustworthy commanders.

As in *They Will Arrive Tomorrow*, the main axis of *Paratroopers* is the clash between two characters, although this time not between two equally ranked officers, but between one of the trainees, Weitzman, and his platoon commander, Yair. Weitzman is not at all suited to soldiering. His superiors have no idea how to deal with him, and so treat him roughly, trying by force to mold him into a soldier. Still worse, they actually abandon him to the abuse of the other trainees, his “brothers in arms.” No mythical camaraderie here!

The first half of the film projects Yair as Weitzman’s opposite. He is the ultimate militaristic

commander, at best unsentimental, at worst, unfeeling. “I used to be a Weitzman and now I’m a terrific soldier,” he tells his fellow officers, thus demanding that Weitzman become the replica of his commanding officer, a bona-fide terrific soldier. Unable and unwilling to reach his difficult trainee, Yair’s repeated reaction to Weitzman’s complaints is to turn his back and exit the frame (a reminder of Uri’s conduct before the last mission in *He Walked Through the Fields*). The last time Yair turns his back, literally and metaphorically, is when he forces Weitzman to persist in a grenade-throwing exercise. Hapless, Weitzman runs frantically into a building immediately after throwing the grenade, where he dies in an accident/suicide.

This is the film’s turning point. Instead of Weitzman transforming into Yair, it is Yair who gradually comes to resemble Weitzman, losing his position and authority, formally and cinematically; losing his self-control, self-confidence and resilience; becoming as marginalized, isolated and vulnerable as Weitzman used to be. He decides to leave the army, but cannot do so and toward the film’s end returns to resume his post. In this way, the two soldier characters fulfill their dramatic and thematic roles as two sides of the militaristic coin: he who is unfit to soldier dies; he who is unfit to be anything but a soldier remains in service.

In this representation, the seemingly steadfast Israeli chain of citizen Weitzmans reshaped into Yair-like fighters and commanders is broken. Following the trauma of the Yom Kippur War, irrespective of national security concerns, there are now Weitzmans who simply do not want to become Yairs. The command as an ideal and commanders as individuals, leading links in the chain, having failed, the future certainty of the whole chain is open to question.

The invisible walls of Jericho – the age of the military governor

After duality and internal conflict comes discord, prompted in Israel’s case by the First Lebanon War (1982). Since this round of fighting was initiated by Israel, its forces invading a neighboring sovereign state, it was regarded not as a war of necessity (“*ein breira*”) but of choice.¹⁶ Large sectors within Israeli society openly opposed the military initiative’s objectives, the Government’s claim to a justifiable “*casus belli*” and the scope of the operation. For the first time, public dissent also found expression in an organized movement of soldiers, principally reservists, who refused to serve.¹⁷ The Lebanon War’s most famous “refusenik” was Colonel Eli Geva, who relinquished his command in opposition to the IDF’s siege of Beirut. Although praised in some quarters for acting ethically, he was widely condemned for his perceived violation of his duty as a commander.¹⁸ This dissonance was echoed in the wide range of letters and petitions – many of them by lower-ranking officers¹⁹ – that declared or supported similar acts of refusal while emphatically reaffirming their authors’ unfaltering commitment to the army and to the state.²⁰

In theater, the option of refusing orders had already appeared in Yossef Mundi’s 1975 play, *Jericho’s Governor* (“*Moshel Yericho*”). Once again, the main character is a commander, in this instance not a junior combat officer but a high-ranking military governor administering military rule over occupied Palestinian territories. Mundi’s *Governor* confronts two antagonists, one human: a soldier called The Schizoid, who refuses to participate in occupational military duties, and the other inanimate: the walls of Jericho.

The “Jericho” of the play is not an actual location but a twilight zone, a metaphor, an illusion. By portraying its walls invisible, the playwright has The Governor ask himself: “are we outside the walls or inside the walls?,” leaving us to contemplate who “we” are. When this is the context, The Governor’s response to The Schizoid’s disobedience and dissent sounds both familiar and

hollow: “there are duties, there are rules, I wasn’t the one to create them, I serve them. I fulfill my role, and you should fulfill your role.”

Looking closer, the rationale behind The Governor’s perception of his role develops in gradual, contradictory phases. First, denial: “this role doesn’t suit me. If I were young I would have run away from here, to Canada, to Australia or to New Zealand.” This proving impossible, there follows a counter-reaction, a kind of over-self-empowerment: “I’m a soldier! I mustn’t think and reflect!... . We need discipline! Discipline! Ha, if a real military regime would be established here, it would be wonderful!” But then final realization sinks in: “And when we will be in the grave they will say the enactment was perfect; but ... even if there is peace, what will I get out of it if I no longer exist?”

In fact, every soldier in Mundi’s play is a schizoid, The Governor being the archetype. For Mundi’s soldier peace implies non-existence, which is why he must soldier on at all costs. The Governor’s fear is not the same as that felt by Uri Kahana, Avi and Jonah or by Tzachik, who fulfill their vocation and sacrifice their lives for an ideological cause. Instead, his is the fear of both the pathologically detached soldier and his dramatic personification facing extinction. While the blatant Schizoid is willing to lose himself in his refusal (“I want to be burnt”), the “latent” schizoid Governor, in a much more fatal way than Yair in *Paratroopers*, is willing to sacrifice his humanity in order to preserve himself as the only thing he can be – a soldier. Nevertheless, in his heart of hearts The Governor knows his real worth in present circumstances: “What does it mean to be the governor of Jericho! *A little officer* with dubious honor, in a hostile environment and with no future ... Who do I govern? ... Who? ... Ghosts?”

The first *Intifada* – the Palestinian uprising in the occupied territories (1987–1993) – challenged convention even further. “I ask myself what has grown in our midst?” confessed Yitzhak Ben-Aharon, a veteran leader of the Israeli Labor party:

Don’t the citizens of this state see what is happening in their own home? They send their children on all those despicable and impossible missions, to be jailers, to encounter stone throwers with gas jets, to be contemptible and inferior.²¹

Here Ben-Aharon conveys the belittling experience – already dramatized by Mundi – Israeli soldiers used to glorification as combatants are presently forced to confront.

Shimon Dotan’s 1986 film *Smile of the Lamb* (“*Chiuch ha-Gdi*,” based on David Grossman’s novel of the same name) provides the background for the intifada by delineating the relationship between occupiers and occupied, and the fine line between power and helplessness. Katzman is a military governor, new to the job and determined to fulfill it in a different, “enlightened” manner. He too has an antagonist – his friend and initially chief collaborator, a doctor bearing the mythical name Uri. Their service in a Palestinian village leads them to the realization that an enlightened occupation is unachievable, and that occupiers are no less enslaved than the occupied. It also leads to their estrangement. Uri empathizes with the oppressed, whereas Katzman becomes the embodiment of the oppressive occupation.

Governor Katzman *is* The Occupation, expressed in his body language, his speech, mannerisms, decisions, presumptions ... and failures. Cinematically, this impression is conveyed by repeatedly framing him in the center, often between “the locals” and his soldiers. He is supposed to facilitate communication between the sides, but instead is a divisive and separating influence. His ineffective efforts at establishing control befitting his role *in* the story transpose into a futile attempt at controlling the story itself. This is brought home poignantly to the

audience as the plot evolves from a minor skirmish with the Palestinian villagers to Uri's tragic death, due to Katzman's mulish effort to preserve his commanding position. Katzman's governorship can only end in violence and unnecessary death, proving again that, paradoxically, excessive power ultimately consumes itself.

Losing the way and falling apart – whether individually or collectively – are customarily preceded by withdrawal, deprecation and helplessness. In the tumultuous decade of the 1990s, Israelis experienced three singularly dislocating events: the First Gulf War in 1991, the 1993 Oslo peace process and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's assassination in 1995. Following one another, these occurrences first evoked a heightened sense of insecurity, continued in ideological polarization and culminated in a possibly irreparable damage to the very foundations of Israel's democracy.

In this instance, too, the dramatic arts heralded social reality. In the midst of the preceding Intifada, another dramatic military governor, and an especially controversial one, appeared on stage: Yitzhak Laor's Ephraim, in the 1989 play *Ephraim Returns to the Army* ("*Ephraim Chozer la-Tsavah*"). Ephraim first appears as a media star, cast as the epitome of Israel's ideal type soldier, only to then be ripped apart by the playwright and exposed as a shell of barely concealed impotence. Like Dotan's Katzman, he is torn between how a soldier is compelled to behave in the present circumstances of military occupation and the kind of mythical soldier he aspires to be and imagines himself to be. He struggles to meet both expectations only to experience defeat and then self-destruction.

Reminiscent of *The Governor of Jericho*, like Yair and in a way also like Katzman, Ephraim cannot exist outside the army.

Of course I stay here [in the army]. How is it even possible to be anywhere else that is not the center, the deepest center. From here I see and hear everything: moving, giving pleasure, frightening, granting mercy or causing injury, and I want to continue penetrating, even deeper.

However, like *The Governor*, Ephraim himself knows this seemingly powerful masculine monologue to be bogus, and says almost in the same breath, "I am the heart? I am only a toenail growing on a dead body." Drained of his physical, sexual and authoritative powers, the false imagery he used to cover it empties out. He shrinks in stature, loses his libido and finally shuts himself in his office, telling his long-suffering wife: "I need to change, Nehama, and I can't. In order to continue being what I am, I need to change and I can't."

Repeatedly announcing "the warrior is tired," *Ephraim Returns to the Army* is replete with allusions not only to Ephraim himself but generically to the heroic mythological Hebrew soldier of the era before and during the establishment of Israel, as depicted in early Israeli theater. Perhaps the most heart-breaking scene in the play is Ephraim's confession to his father, a representative of that idealistic and idealized generation:

Sometimes, father, I want to call for you to help me, but then I understand you cannot anymore, that everything you might have helped me with is over... . You're not with me. You're with them. If you weren't with them, I wouldn't have stayed in the army, Daddy.

Adding perspective, the protagonist's name and the title of the play are an ironic flashback to S. Yizhar's 1938 novella *Ephraim Goes Back to Alfalfa*. The present Ephraim is a grotesque

version of the former heroic figure, who Laor considers now *passé*. The play's author establishes Ephraim not as a soldier but as an archetypal image of a soldier, actually a falsified imaginary exemplary soldier, an anti-nostalgic version of the likes of Sender in *Not by Day and Not by Night*. Laor queries not only the IDF soldier of today, but also of yesterday. For him, and for his attentive audience, this character's appearance as a contemporary military governor, conqueror and oppressor of civilians, raises doubts about the foundational values prevalent when the Hebrew/Israeli soldier first appeared on stage and screen as a liberator and founder of a new society.

The screw in the machine – the age of the marionette

In surveying Israeli military history, three figures personify the three key periods analyzed thus far. Yigal Allon, a senior commander before and during the War of Independence, and an icon of informality, camaraderie and integrity. Moshe Dayan, the general celebrated for his 1956 and 1967 campaigns and known for his professionalism and relentless pursuit of military objectives. Yitzhak Rabin, the great conqueror of the Six-Day War who as Prime Minister lost his life while attempting diplomatically to relinquish those territorial conquests in exchange for peace.

Over two decades have elapsed since Rabin's assassination. A new succession of former IDF commanders has attained political power, Ehud Barak and Ariel Sharon being the most prominent. By and by, generals have reached the Israeli stage too. If the era of cultural and military consolidation lavished attention on the young junior officer, and the era of confusion and self-doubt placed the military governor center stage, now the senior figures who pull or might have pulled the strings are subjected to exposure.²² Ariel Sharon, whose personal responsibility for the bitter fate of soldiers dispatched to Lebanon was only alluded to in Haim Bouzaglo's 1992 film *The Cherry Season*, becomes the protagonist in Yaron Edelstein's 2014 play *Mountain* ("Har"). Similar prominence is now accorded to Rafael ("Raful") Eitan, Chief of Staff in the First Lebanon War, in Yonatan Levy's 2014 play *The General and the Sea* ("Raful ve haYam").

Hillel Mittelpunkt's play *Gorodish* provides another interesting example. First produced by the Cameri theatre in 1993 and restaged in 2014 with modifications, *Gorodish* tells the story of Shmuel Gonen (formerly Gorodish). A two-star general in command of the southern front with Egypt during the Yom Kippur War, he was judged by the Agranat special investigative committee to have "failed to fulfill his duties adequately," and to bear "much of the responsibility for the dangerous situation in which our troops were caught."²³

If the beginning of the play typecasts Gorodish as the ultimate commander, a glorified hero of the Six-Day War, by the last act he is a pariah, an expatriate alone in the wilds of central Africa. A tragic hero²⁴ plunging from power and glory to infamy and exile, the play relates "that he had died three times": initially in the Yom Kippur War, then after the Agranat Committee and thirdly when he departed for Africa. The line "when he died in '91 they said: it is only the end of a sad and prolonged funeral" hints to the broader context the playwright alludes to sub-textually.

The *Gorodish* biography allows Mittelpunkt to analyze Israeli society, first in 1993 and then in 2014. His central theme interprets Gorodish's fate as a product of the split vision by which Israelis saw themselves through him. "Until '73 he is the good soldier, of the Tanks of Tammuz."²⁵ Since '73 he is a complicated, complicating character ... bad news ... a victim ... an obsession ... "People loved you [Gorodish] because they saw in you everything they wanted to see in themselves, and they hate you today because they see in you everything they hate to see in

themselves.” The closing line reads, “That [1967] was the best year of his life. Those were our deceitful years.”

In both the 1993 and 2014 versions, Mittelpunkt shifts the blame for the Yom Kippur War (and beyond) to the politicians, or as he phrases it, the grinder that crushes the little screw. “Being a two-star general, he [Gorodish] didn’t understand he is merely a screw, a screw in a grinder.” “The Six Days were an excellent grind, Yom Kippur was a crap grind, a malfunction ... and the machine decided to sacrifice a screw, him. What are you going to claim? That the tragedy was the small screw’s? The machine’s?”

Where the two play versions diverge is that the first alleges that decisions made before the 1973 War were designed to promote peace prospects with Egypt, while the second suggests the absolute opposite: decisions were taken in order to discourage peace, so that territories acquired in 1967 could be retained by Israel.

Wars are waged and sacrifices demanded – whether bodily, by low-ranking foot soldiers, or by higher-ranking commanders like Gorodish forfeiting career reputation and position. In the revised version this criticism is more severe and reflects Mittelpunkt’s later recognition of a political reality that prefers the continued sacrifice of soldiers in an endless war to relinquishing gains from the previous rounds of this war. He portrays all soldiers, irrespective of rank, as little more than marionettes in the hands of policy makers.²⁶ Politicians change with each passing wind, soldiers never do, as Gorodish says of Dayan: “Each time a different mask, a different face, a different lie ... I had one face my whole life. *The face of a soldier and a commander.*”

Returning full circle to the simple Israeli soldier–commander in the field, we find him increasingly aware that his fate is determined by political interests rather than “pure” military concerns and thus recognizes himself to be part of a fabric that is political rather than a clearly defined set of military codes and values. This awareness can be illustrated by a comparison of Joseph Cedar’s 2007 film *Beaufort* and the 1950 play *They Will Arrive Tomorrow* (discussed above).

Soldiers in these two works find themselves trapped in similar situations. In the earlier play, they wait for the mines on the hill to blow up under the feet of their comrades; in the film (set in the year 2000) they await orders to withdraw from their post, located in a medieval fortress on a hill in southern Lebanon, as shells fall around them, each round killing another soldier. Thus, they are no different than the mannequins – decoys – scattered around the camp to deceive an invisible enemy. Given this shared framework, questions as to the role, responsibility and ethics of military command become pivotal to both works.

The contrasting perspectives expressed in *They Will Arrive Tomorrow* by Avi and Jonah are articulated in *Beaufort* by Liraz, the unrelenting militaristic platoon commander, and by several of his soldiers. This time the focus of debate shifts from the establishment of a new state and a new army to that formidable army’s already established “face.” Liraz’s antagonists are Ziv, who questions the need to seize the Beaufort fortress during the Lebanon War 18 years before; Oshri, the popular platoon sergeant, a soft-spoken and open-minded “Avi” to Liraz’s rigid and inaccessible “Jonah”; and Koris, the medic who is Liraz’s principal antagonist.

Unlike Ziv, who challenges a specific military decision (hinting at its political context), and Oshri, who posits an alternative model of military command, Koris judges everything as one giant, tragic waste. He demands that Liraz prioritize his soldiers’ well-being, distrusting the remote chain of decision-making Liraz still reveres and obeys. Like Jonah in the end of the 1950 play, at the moment of truth Liraz freezes. When Oshri, his trusted sergeant and best friend, is wounded he remains glued to the spot, leaving Koris to perform the rescue. The exemplary

military commander still idealizing the old myths is thus replaced by his ideologically anti-heroic opponent.

The two men clash even more fiercely when commanded to stay one more night in the already evacuated fortress, an order that endangers them further for no apparent military reason. Again Liraz obeys, and Koris protests. When Koris declares: “We deserve a better commander than you,” Liraz responds: “I don’t deserve to be the one fleeing the Beaufort.” Abandoning his post, either by leaving or by forfeiting his military duties, means destroying the myth Liraz clings to almost to the end. After joining his soldiers on the dreaded guard duty for that last night, thus adopting “Avi’s” style of command, he finally succumbs and exempts them from that duty when the price becomes unbearable, and another soldier is killed.²⁷

All that remains is for him to take charge of the withdrawal, blow up the site and lead his soldiers back home. Cinematically, this shift in Liraz’s commanding figure is achieved by sharpening his filmic image. Initially appearing on screen in a blurred and undistinguished silhouette, boxed in a dark doorframe against the harsh light from outside, now, when entering from outside, his figure is distinctively clear. The film ends with Liraz kneeling and peeling off his heavy army gear, while the gate in the Israeli–Lebanese border fence closes shut behind him.

Conclusion

Distrust of military and political decision-making, accompanied by the undermining of old myths and values, may seem an inevitable outcome of the longer-term process traced in this chapter. The dramatic representation of that process has led us from the comrade–commander, representing shared faith and unity, to the low-ranking officer detached from his soldiers and from himself, to the military governor decomposing in self-doubt and finally, in varying degrees, to openly challenged iconic symbols of Israel’s military ethos.

It seems that over the years, the artistic–dramatic field has become gradually unhinged from the social one. Encouraged by politicians as part of their own shorter-term partisan agendas, soldiers today do express dissociation with military command, but replace it with an alternative combat doctrine based on their political affiliation, better suited in their eyes to traditional, national values and goals. Thus, drama, for the most part, may have been accurate in foreshadowing the changed spirit of the IDF, but was inaccurate in realizing the exact “character” it would give its foot soldiers.²⁸

One general-turned-politician has already fallen victim to this new partisan vogue. In May 2016, former Chief of Staff Moshe (“Bogie”) Ya’alon resigned under pressure as Defense Minister after having denounced a soldier who shot a Palestinian, already wounded and dying after attacking another soldier in Hebron.²⁹ In this highly publicized case, soldiers in uniform reacted angrily and with disbelief when Ya’alon and leading IDF spokesmen, as well as the soldier’s direct COs, depicted the shooting of the injured Palestinian as an infraction of IDF values, and a crime for which the perpetrator should be tried. Significantly, Ya’alon was replaced by Avigdor Lieberman, who – contrary to his predecessor – was outspoken in his support for the “shooting soldier.”

Traditional security values based on the principle of “the purity of arms” may still be an integral part of the older generation’s self-image as soldiers and commanders; but not for their contemporary successors. The latter cannot recall when being an Israeli soldier did not mean being part of an occupying force. They have never fought a standing army. The weapons they

confront are homemade bombs and knives wielded by civilians. For them, occupational duties are the current era's heroism, and Uri Kahana's or even Liraz's sensibilities have no possible relevance. Today's recruits are the commanders of the future, and the future – as touched upon on stage and screen but never fully comprehended – is already here.

Notes

- 1 Dan Horowitz and Moshe Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia: The Overburdened Polity of Israel* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1990, pp. 249, 252. Translations from Hebrew to English throughout the essay are the author's. Regular service is for 2–3 years for 18-year-olds, and reserve duty for approximately 20 years afterward.
- 2 Bruce Wilshire, *Role Playing and Identity*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1982, pp. 22, 24.
- 3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, quoted by Paisley Livingston, "Characterization and Fictional Truth in the Cinema," in: David Bordwell and Noel Carroll (eds.) *Post-Theory – Reconstructing Film Studies*. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1996, p. 155.
- 4 Yesha'ayahu Weinberg, director of the Cameri Theatre 1961–1975, quoted in Gad Kaynar, "The Cameri Theatre – The First 50 Years," in: Rivka Meshulach (ed.) *The Cameri of Tel-Aviv – 50 Years of Israeli Theatre* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Daniella Dinur, 1997, p. 31.
- 5 Shosh Avigal, "Patterns and Trends in Israeli Drama and Theater, 1948 to Present," in: Linda Ben-Zvi (ed.), *Theater in Israel*. Michigan University Press: Ann Arbor, 1996, p. 33.
- 6 Michael Handzelzalts, "Occupied Words," *Ha'aretz* (Hebrew Daily), June 6, 2007.
- 7 For elaboration see: Tali Silberstein, *That's the Way to Make Soldiers: The Character of the Soldier in Israeli Theatre and Film* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Resling, 2013.
- 8 Oz Almog, *The Sabra: The Creation of the New Jew* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1997, p. 205.
- 9 Israel Gur, "Chapters of the Original Play in Israel" (Hebrew), *Bama* 91–92 (1982): 14.
- 10 Odeya Kohan-Raz, "The Character of the Commander in Israeli Cinema" (Hebrew), *Terminal* 34 (September 2008): 13.
- 11 Almog, *The Sabra*, p. 209.
- 12 Gideon Ofrat, *Israeli Drama* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Cherikover and the Hebrew University, 1975, p. 38.
- 13 Chaim Shoham, *Challenge and Reality in Israeli Drama* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Or-Am, 1989, p. 89.
- 14 S. N. Eisenstadt, *The Transformation of Israel Society* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989, pp. 372–375.
- 15 Horowitz and Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia*, pp. 252, 267.
- 16 Contrary to popular belief it was not necessarily the first conflict to be thus designated.
- 17 Peretz Kidron, *Refusenik! Israel's Soldiers of Conscience* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Hargol & Books in the Attic, 2004, p. 16.
- 18 Meir Pa'il, *The Commander: Temperate Military Leadership* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad & the Ministry of Defense, 2003, p. 42.
- 19 Horowitz and Lissak, *Trouble in Utopia*, p. 268.
- 20 Kidron, *Refusenik!*, p. 43.
- 21 Dvar Hashavua, January 1988, cited *ibid.*, p. 195.
- 22 Yair Ashkenazi, "Sharon, Rafal and Gorodish Ascend the Israeli Stage," *Ha'aretz*, April 10, 2015.
- 23 *Agranat Commission Partial Report*, Vol. 2, April 1, 1974, pp. 298–371 (Hebrew). <http://archivesdocs.mod.gov.il/Agranat/2/album/index.html>.
- 24 See also: Nurith Nethanel, *Breaking Mirrors: Representing and Fashioning Israeliness in the Plays of Yehoshua Sobol and Hillel Mittelpunkt* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad and Mofet Institute, 2012, pp. 204–206.
- 25 Alluding to the title of a famous book by Shabtai Tevet published in 1968. The original title in Hebrew, "Exposed in the Turret" (*Hasufim Ba-Tsariach*), became a slogan symbolizing the glorification of the soldiers of the Six-Day War.
- 26 *The Cherry Season*, made at the time of Gorodish's first production, presents the vague figure of Minister of Defense Ariel Sharon as a master of marionettes.
- 27 See also: Raz Yosef, "Traces of War: Memory, Trauma and the Archive in Joseph Cedar's Beaufort," *Cinema Journal* 50 (2011): 61–83.
- 28 Hanoch Levin being again the exception proving the rule. See his 1997 play *Murder*.
- 29 Ironically, in a critical article discussing Ya'alon's later political moves, Uri Misgav states: "A straight line connects 'Uri' (the protagonist of Shamir's *He Walked Through the Fields* (1948), discussed above) to 'Bogie'" (*Ha'aretz*, October 23, 2017). See also Moran Yarchi, Chapter 5, in this volume.

Part III

Framing security policy

12

National security decision-making

Charles (Chuck) D. Freilich

By any measure of democratic governance, socio-economic development and military prowess, Israel has been an historic success. In recent decades, however, this increasingly appears to be *despite* its national security decision-making process (DMP), not because of it. In some cases, success is also traceable to Israel's ability to convert fundamental failings into tactical advantages.

This chapter presents an overview of the strengths and weaknesses of Israel's national security DMP after 70 years of sovereignty. The first section analyzes three causal variables that determine the character of Israel's DMP. Thereafter, the chapter presents the DMP's salient characteristics.

Causal variables

Israel's singularly adverse strategic environment

Ever since its establishment, Israel has faced a uniquely harsh external environment, in which ongoing low-level hostilities have been punctuated by both recurring rounds of large-scale warfare and bouts of diplomacy. Although a small nation, Israel looms large on the world stage, with a disproportionate impact on international attention. Both the severity of the national security challenges Israel faces and Israel's importance in the international arena imbue its national security decision-making process (DMP) with particular importance. Israel's strategic environment is uniquely inhospitable and menacing, bearing little comparison to any other. Numerous countries have faced the threat of politicide (destruction of the state). France and Belgium, for example, were conquered by Germany in World War II, but continued to exist as national entities, and a majority of their population survived the war comparatively well. Israel, in contrast, is unique in modern times, in that it has feared not just politicide, but genocide, extermination of its people. In the early decades of the conflict, the Arab countries pledged themselves to Israel's destruction. Today that vow is repeated by *Hamas*, *Hizbullah* and non-Arab but Islamic Iran.

Iran is presently the greatest threat to Israel's security. Teheran continues to aspire to a military nuclear capability, and will pose a potentially existential threat to Israel should it ultimately cross the nuclear threshold. Moreover, if Iran does acquire nuclear weapons, additional regional actors may do so as well. A multi-nuclear Middle East is a nightmare

scenario.

Iran has provided *Hizbullah*, its Lebanese proxy, with a vast arsenal of well over 100,000 rockets, which are likely to cause unprecedented damage to Israel's home front in a future conflict.¹ Furthermore, Iran is now establishing a growing presence in Syria, in effect creating a united and potentially far more dangerous Lebanese–Syrian front as part of a “Shiite crescent” extending from Iran to the Mediterranean. On Israel's southern front, *Hamas*, a radical fundamentalist organization, in control of Gaza for over a decade, also has a potent rocket arsenal – one that can be highly disruptive of life in Israel.

Israel has faced ongoing terrorism from the earliest days, actually, long before its establishment. Although Israel has successfully kept terrorism to a level that its society can tolerate, allowing it to thrive, there have been periods of heightened terrorism perceived in Israel as a direct challenge to the very fabric of its society.² Indeed, the number of Israelis killed by terrorism is greater than in any other democracy.³ Terrorism has also exerted a significant impact on Israeli public opinion, hardening attitudes towards peace and Israel's negotiating positions, with a decisive impact on the on the outcome of a number of elections.

Israel's leaders have had to make historic decisions with astonishing frequency, the kind that most countries make once in decades or even generations. Some have been decisions to go to war or to take significant military action; others have been decisions related to peace, with similarly fateful consequences for Israel's future. The stress imposed by such decisions on Israel's leaders, as individuals, and on the decision-making system as a whole, is enormous.

A difficult environment to shape

Arab enmity was so deep during the early decades of Israel's statehood that it largely precluded an Israeli ability to shape its external environment, either militarily or diplomatically. Despite repeated military victories, Israel has never been able to determine the nature of the post-conflict peace. Indeed, the Arab states long responded to defeat by refusing to negotiate with Israel, let alone recognize or make peace with it. None of the dramatic proposals put forward for an Israeli–Palestinian peace accord – Camp David 2000, the Clinton Parameters 2000 and the Olmert proposal of 2008 – achieved a breakthrough. Likewise, the Geneva summit of 2000 failed to produce an agreement with Syria. In all of these instances, far-reaching Israeli concessions (the establishment of a Palestinian state on virtually 100% of the West Bank and Gaza and a division of Jerusalem; or withdrawal from the Golan Heights) proved fruitless.

Ever since Egyptian President Sadat's peace initiative in 1977, Israel's strategic environment has become considerably more complex and nuanced, providing greater opportunities for peace than in the past. Nonetheless, the fundamental view of Arab hostility has persisted, and a large segment of Israel's political spectrum continues to perceive only a very limited range of options, whether military or diplomatic. Thus, for example, Iran's enmity toward Israel, as well as that of *Hizbullah* and *Hamas*, is regarded as fundamental, stemming from Israel's very existence and not from any specific policy that, if changed, might substantively affect their attitudes.

Rapid and extreme change

The contemporary Middle East continues to undergo extraordinarily swift and sweeping transformations. Since the outbreak of the “Arab Spring” in 2010, Egypt has experienced three revolutions, while Iraq and Syria have come apart and their futures remain unclear. Vicious civil

wars are underway in Yemen and Libya, and chaos continues to pervade Lebanon. Saudi Arabia is undergoing dramatic domestic change, whose outcome will have major ramifications for the region and for the world. Iran has emerged as the leading regional player, upsetting the historic balance between the Sunna and Shia. Change in the region is so rapid and broad that crisis almost becomes the steady state for Israel, and the degree of uncertainty its decision-makers face is extreme.

A broad and complex environment

By right, like other states its size, Israel ought to focus primarily on its proximate vicinity. In practice, however, its interests span much of the world. Ever since the 1980s, Israel's fundamental security has been threatened not just by its immediate neighbors but also by the WMD arsenals of more distant countries such as Iraq, Libya and Iran. North Korea's nuclear and missile ties with these countries, and with Syria, have made this relatively distant country an important focus of Israeli attention, too. Israel has played an important role on broader international issues, such as the two Gulf Wars and efforts at blocking Iran's nuclear program.

Israel does of course possess a vital strategic asset in its "special relationship" with the United States. A partial loss of Israel's independence, however, has been the price and Israel's ability even to survive today without the US is questionable. From a comparatively straightforward arms supply relationship, US-Israeli ties have come to encompass highly sophisticated joint weapons development, counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation programs; and Israel has been designated a "major strategic partner," a unique status yet to be granted to any non-treaty partner. Moreover, the deep American role in Middle Eastern affairs, as well as US concerns regarding Israel's expanding ties with nations such as China and India, has added a new set of global considerations for Israeli leaders.⁴

American regional stature has waned since the 2010s, leaving a vacuum increasingly filled by a resurgent Russia. Today, bilateral relations between Russia and Israel are friendly, but their interests clash on important issues, especially Iran and Syria, two of Israel's foremost concerns. While Moscow has demonstrated a willingness to take Israel's security concerns into account, its policies are driven, first and foremost, by global considerations, over which Israel can exert little influence.

Individually and collectively, the countries that comprise the European Union are assuming increasing importance for Israel. Europe played a critical role on the Iranian nuclear issue and its longstanding opposition to Israel's West Bank policies has been a primary cause of the deterioration in its international standing. Since the EU is Israel's largest trading partner, and also a source of extensive political and military ties, the relationship will continue to be vitally important. Nevertheless, in the absence of progress with the Palestinians, relations are likely to further sour.

The Far East has also become an area of considerable Israeli interest. Not just because of North Korean proliferation, but owing to Israel's rapidly expanding relations with China, Japan and South Korea. China has yet to become a major factor in Israel's strategic (though not economic) calculus, but its involvement in the region is likely to grow in the coming years and, as a permanent member of the Security Council, it has already adopted unfavorable positions on a number of issues of major importance for Israel, e.g. Iran's nuclear program. The Indian subcontinent has also become a focus of great interest, due to Indian and Pakistani proliferation and especially Israel's burgeoning relationship with India.

In recent years, various African nations have renewed long-severed ties with Israel and a number of South American countries have deepened them. Perhaps most importantly, a shared fear of Iran and radical Jihadi organizations has reportedly led Saudi Arabia and some other Gulf countries to begin covert contacts with Israel.⁵

In sum, economic and security necessities, together with fresh and prospective diplomatic openings, have driven Israel to pursue an almost global outreach, clearly disproportionate to its size as a nation. All of this adds to the dual challenge of conducting an effective policymaking process and formulating a coherent national security strategy.

Israel's electoral system

Israel is a parliamentary democracy. The 120 seat *Knesset* (parliament) is elected on the basis of proportional representation (PR), i.e. each party's representation is a function of its relative share of the overall vote. Thus, for example, a party that gains 10% of the vote receives 12 seats. Coupled with a low electoral threshold (3.25% of the votes), Israel's PR system is one of the most representative in the world, but it imposes a high price in terms of governability. The fragmentation produced by the system means that no party has ever been able to form a government on its own and all governments have been coalitions, often consisting of some half-dozen constituent parties. No government in Israel's entire history has served a full four-year term.

As in all parliamentary systems, Israel's Cabinet, termed "the government" (*ha'memshala*) is a direct outgrowth of the *Knesset* and, by definition, almost always enjoys a majority therein. Consequently, there is no real separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches (although the judiciary is independent of both), and the *Knesset* has only limited influence on policymaking. Ministers in Israel are political figures in their own right, appointed to their positions on the basis of the relative political clout that they and their party can wield, rather than because of their professional expertise, managerial skills, or personal preferences, regarding the ministries they wish to head. As independent political actors, ministers are not truly subservient to the premier; indeed, they are often the premier's chief rivals. The premier is neither "commander-in-chief," nor "chief executive" and, as in other parliamentary systems, is ostensibly just "first among equals," requiring Cabinet approval for virtually all decisions, including the use of force.

Primacy of the defense establishment

Given the harsh circumstances of Israel's birth and decades of ongoing hostilities, the defense establishment controls a disproportionate share of national resources. From the outset, most capabilities were concentrated within the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and intelligence agencies, whereas the roles of the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and especially that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) were far more circumscribed.

The IDF General Staff, unlike the US Joint Chiefs, is a unified military structure under the direct command of the Chief of Staff (CoS), who has clear and final authority in all areas. Instead of the IDF being subordinate to the MoD, the division of functions is complementary. The IDF has authority over military organization and force structure, operations, intelligence, strategic planning, training, doctrine, logistics and personnel. The MoD is responsible for the defense

budget, arms procurement and exports. Furthermore, the IDF is subordinate to the *minister* of defense, not to the ministry, which is neither legally authorized to exercise supervision over the IDF, nor organizationally structured to do so.

Military Intelligence is responsible for the National Intelligence Assessment and is the primary, though not sole, source of intelligence presented to the Cabinet. The IDF Planning Branch remains the primary strategic planning entity, nearly 20 years after the establishment of the National Security Staff (NSS). Given Israel's strategic exigencies, implementation of national security policy commonly takes the form of military, rather than diplomatic action, and therefore is executed by the IDF. The IDF is thus the lead agency in all stages of the policymaking process – situational assessment, policy formulation and implementation.

The Foreign Ministry has long been the stepchild of Israel's national security DMP. In recent decades, it has been almost completely marginalized and focuses overwhelmingly on the day-to-day management of Israel's foreign relations, rather than on policy formulation. Furthermore, over the years many diplomatic contacts – both overt and covert – with Arab and other countries have been conducted by the IDF, with military cooperation an important means of promoting relations. The IDF has thus come to fulfill a central role in foreign policy, too. Its responsibility for civil administration in the West Bank has only furthered its dominant influence over an entire range of important issues, many of a purely civilian and particularly sensitive character.

The IDF's institutionalized role in the DMP, as well as the high accessibility afforded by the small size of the political and military elites and the close personal ties between them, makes it a highly influential pressure group. Virtually all ministers have served in the IDF as conscripts and reservists; many of them are former senior officers and defense officials. Furthermore, a disproportionate share of the national labor force is employed by the military and military-related industries, thereby making the IDF, and the defense establishment as a whole, a major economic force.

A final, and vital, source of IDF influence is its perceived role as the primary representative of the national collective, as a strictly professional, non-partisan and trustworthy actor, around whose positions the warring factions in the coalition can coalesce. The IDF's unique prestige and status in Israeli life, largely true of the defense establishment as a whole, facilitates its ability to play this role to an unusual degree. Political leaders use IDF assessments and recommendations as a means of legitimizing political positions and of easing the way to compromise. IDF positions do not dictate the nature of Cabinet debate and decisions, but do wield enormous influence. If the IDF says it is so, it is easier for ministers to adapt their positions accordingly.

The national security decision-making process

The following section presents 15 salient characteristics of the Israeli national security DMP. Its purpose is to describe how the system operates in practice and, more importantly, to facilitate understanding of that behavior.

A highly politicized cabinet-level DMP

Seventy years after its establishment, Israeli political life remains unusually intense. Partly the result of the severity of the threats Israel faces, its electorate is deeply divided over a number of fundamental issues, both domestic and foreign. Consequently, political issues are typically

debated in highly ideological and partisan terms, and political considerations exert a significant impact on the DMP, foreclosing some options in advance, channeling others in given directions. Certainly appropriate in regard to inherently ideological issues, such as the future of the West Bank, this situation often impacts decisively on issues in which political considerations should not be a significant factor. The final Cabinet decision in 1987 to cancel the Lavi fighter, for example, the largest and most expensive weapons development program in Israel's history, was made on a purely partisan basis.⁶

With short terms between elections, typically only 2–3 years, and a frenetic 24/7 news cycle, both premiers and ministers are consumed with the need to ensure their political futures, and consequently to jockey for position and pander to their party constituencies. For most ministers, political success is tied more to intra-party politics than to the ability to effectively promote their ministerial portfolios. Even though prime ministers, defense ministers and foreign ministers are expected to remain at least partially above the political fray and are held somewhat more accountable for the conduct of their ministerial duties, they, too, are forced to devote inordinate attention to party politics, at the expense of policy and governance.

Pragmatism, despite politicization

While policy at the Cabinet level is often highly charged politically, the national security establishment takes a practical, problem-solving approach. Thus, for example, the IDF has supported various peace proposals; has adopted a pragmatic approach to administering the occupied territories; and has objected to weapons development or procurement plans it considered politically motivated. Similarly, it has refrained from involvement in public discourse over such politically charged issues as the enlistment of ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) conscripts.

In reality, dynamic and pragmatic decision-making characterizes much of the political leadership, too. When faced with necessity or opportunity, Israeli leaders have repeatedly demonstrated the ability to revise existing policies, even those based on long, deeply held convictions and strategic outlooks. Begin withdrew from Sinai, Rabin and Peres reached the Oslo Agreement, Barak made far-reaching proposals for peace with the Palestinians and Syrians, Sharon unilaterally withdrew from Gaza and Olmert sought a dramatic breakthrough with the Palestinians. However, the fundamental pragmatism of the Israeli DMP appears to have diminished in recent years, with the rise of more hardline governments.

Coalition maintenance is an all-consuming preoccupation

From the moment elections end and a coalition is formed, its preservation becomes a nearly full-time preoccupation for the premier, often superseding all other considerations. The mechanics of coalition maintenance, including the imperative for compromise and consensus, turn the Cabinet into a forum for ironing out differences between its component parties, or obfuscating them, rather than a true policymaking body. The result is a clear tendency toward procrastination, sequential decision-making and partial solutions, often paralysis, as leaders wait for issues to reach the point where they have no choice but to act. “What will fly,” the minimum common denominator needed to obtain approval for a decision, at times almost any decision rather than an effective response to the situation, typically becomes the criterion for decision-making. In short, the Cabinet becomes an arena for *politics* making, not policymaking.

The premier is only partly in charge

With highly circumscribed formal prerogatives of office, an Israeli premier's ability to lead is essentially a function of his or her political skills and actual power at any given moment.

Those premiers who have been in firm control of their parties and coalitions have proven to be effective and powerful leaders, capable of promoting ambitious political agendas. Those lacking such advantages have found that their limited formal sources of authority have left them at the mercy of the contending political forces, often at critical junctures, with crucial ramifications for the DMP. Menachem Begin, for instance, was only able to obtain *Knesset* approval for the 1978 Camp David Accords with the support of the opposition. Ehud Barak no longer enjoyed a *Knesset* majority at the Camp David Summit in 2000, thereby making it painfully obvious he would be forced to call for elections, which he would probably lose, and weakening his negotiating position. Ariel Sharon was only able to obtain approval for the 2005 disengagement from Gaza at the price of a split within his party and a willingness to risk his own political future.

In recent decades, as party coherence diminishes and politicization increases, the limits to a premier's authority are becoming still more pronounced. The results include not just repeated coalition crises and attenuated terms of office, but increasingly detrimental consequences for the premier's ability to govern even on a day-to-day basis, let alone chart a long-term course for the nation.

The Cabinet is dysfunctional

Israel's Cabinet has become a largely dysfunctional forum. Ministers, as noted, are typically professional politicians, not experts in their spheres of responsibility or in management, thereby raising questions of their basic competence to deal with the issues at hand. Moreover, the Cabinet's size has become unmanageable, precluding the conduct of effective and discreet deliberations. Meetings tend to consist largely of political grandstanding and ministerial statements are commonly made with an eye to media coverage, and even designed to be leaked almost immediately. The Ministerial Committee on Defense (MCoD), the ostensible solution to the problem of Cabinet size and secrecy, is also too large, and leaks too much, to fulfill its intended purpose.

Given the minimal political consensus holding coalitions together, ministries come to "belong" to the minister and/or party by which they are headed, making the Cabinet a conglomerate of semi-autonomous ministerial fiefdoms. Moreover, once ministers have devoted time and resources to the formulation of preferred policy options, they are loath to reopen an issue in a large and politicized body. Cabinet meetings thus become an ordeal to get through with minimal interference, rather than a venue for serious policy deliberation.⁷ Cabinet decisions are often made for purely political and symbolic reasons. Many cabinet decisions – a common working figure is some 40–70% – are never implemented.⁸ Often, there was no intention of implementing them at all.

The list of shortcomings goes on. Partly because they do not avail themselves of the policy assistance available to them through the NSS, whether due to lack of time or inclination, ministers are often poorly prepared for Cabinet meetings. In assessing policy options, they thus tend to rely on their general knowledge, intuition, preconceptions and the information gleaned from the media and casual conversations. With ministers insufficiently prepared, Cabinet meetings are devoted largely to situational assessments, leaving insufficient time for substantive

policy formulation.⁹

Policy proposals are usually presented by the relevant minister or by the premier, both of them policy advocates, who invariably state a favored position the Cabinet can typically either accept or reject. While the NSS does now often propose alternative policy options, they are generally not the subject of a serious and systematic attempt to assess the differing courses of action. The shallow, almost vacuous, annual deliberations on the defense budget – by far the largest single component in the national budget – are a recurring example of the Cabinet’s inability to deal with complex national security issues.

In contrast with the dysfunctional Cabinet-level DMP, the decision-making process in the defense establishment is highly structured and systematic. The problem begins when the defense establishment’s orderly DMP meets the semi-chaos at the Cabinet level.

The true locus of decision-making is in informal forums

Given the limitations of both the Cabinet and MCoD as decision-making bodies, premiers have demonstrated a marked propensity to formulate policy on their own, or in two types of *informal* settings; the so-called kitchen cabinets, better known in recent years as a “forum of seven” or “forum of eight” ministers, and in even smaller ad hoc forums. The latter usually consist of only those few senior officeholders with whom a prime minister is obligated to consult (e.g., the defense minister, CoS and intelligence chiefs, in some cases the foreign minister) and possibly one or two trusted and respected ministers or senior advisors.

Both kinds of informal forums do provide for efficient and discreet policy formulation, and their recommendations often carry considerable weight. However, they do not possess statutory authority to make decisions; their recommendations must be formally approved by either the MCoD or the Cabinet plenum. With a premier holding few formal prerogatives of office and a dysfunctional Cabinet, Israel does not have an effective statutory decision-making forum.

Systematic policymaking conflicts with political needs

Time and again, Israeli premiers have manifested a pronounced preference to avoid systematic decision-making processes. This finding has been true of both those premiers who have attained office through a “political route” (e.g., Begin, Olmert and Netanyahu), as well as those who had engaged in extensive strategic planning throughout long careers in the defense establishment (such as Rabin and Barak, former chiefs of staff, and Sharon), a former general. This is clearly not a chance outcome and is essential to an understanding of the Israeli DMP.

Systematic policymaking consists of three primary components: formulating objectives; prioritizing among them; and identifying the optimal policy option for achieving the prioritized objective(s). However, the politicized nature of Israel’s DMP, the prime minister’s limited statutory authority, the dysfunctions of the Cabinet and the exigencies of coalition politics, including leaks, all dictate the political wisdom of avoiding clearly defined policy objectives and of maintaining constructive ambiguity. In practice, the conduct of systematic policymaking processes directly conflicts with the premier’s political needs. Indeed, the fear of politicization and leaks is so great that premiers are often unwilling even to consult with the defense establishment or the NSS and not just the Cabinet.¹⁰

By way of illustration, Prime Minister Begin attended the 1978 Camp David summit without any substantive preparation, and quashed the one major study conducted by the IDF prior to it.

Yitzhak Rabin kept the defense establishment in the dark regarding the 1993 Oslo Agreement until after the fact. Ariel Sharon decided on the 2005 Gaza Disengagement Plan without consulting the defense establishment and NSS, turning to them only for input on the best ways of implementing the course he already had settled upon.

On many issues, including those of major importance, Israel simply does not have policies beyond the personal proclivities of the premier and other senior ministers, and issues tend to be dealt with separately, in an “atomistic” fashion, rather than as part of an overall strategy. Major policy outcomes typically come to be the cumulative and even unintended outcome of a series of ad hoc solutions to immediate needs, rather than of a deliberately chosen course of action. Fundamental aspects of the Gaza disengagement plan, for example, remained unresolved immediately prior to its implementation.

Improvisation and crisis management are the norm

The unavoidable outcome of the scarcity of resources during Israel’s early decades, as well as its ongoing extraordinarily volatile and hostile external environment, improvisation and crisis management remain primary characteristics of the Israeli DMP to this day. They are further reinforced by the rapid rate of coalition turnover, which forces decision-makers to focus on the immediate electoral ramifications of their actions rather than long-term governance. The result is a national security DMP geared overwhelmingly toward the resolution of concrete and immediate problems, rather than a consideration of long-term objectives.

Improvisation and crisis management were highly successful in the early decades, but are increasingly inappropriate to Israel’s current reality. Having won its existence, the primary challenges Israel faces today are of a longer-term nature. This is certainly true of the Iranian nuclear program, but also the *Hizbulla* threat, the Palestinian issue and more.

It is important, however, to understand the advantages provided by improvisation. In a politically charged society, improvisation vitiates the need to formulate clearly articulated objectives and priorities and thus suits the pressing political needs of the premier and other ministers. Moreover, in Israel’s febrile environment, this ability to improvise and rapidly adapt to changing circumstances is both a vital necessity and an asset. Israel greatly overdoes it, improvising when it is neither necessary nor appropriate, but improvisation is a sphere of national excellence.

Idiosyncratic decision-making

Most Israeli leaders come to office with long experience in national security affairs, having served in senior positions in the defense establishment and/or other Cabinet positions. Consequently, they also often possess strongly held views. As the national security issues Israel faces in recent decades move beyond the comparatively familiar ones of the ongoing Arab–Israeli conflict, these leaders’ need for policy advice has undoubtedly grown. On the core issues, however, many apparently believe, not without reason, that their expertise exceeds that of the senior officials reporting to them and thus tend to downplay the importance of consultation and systematic policymaking. Furthermore, Israeli society has long celebrated “can do” leaders who press forward without regard for constraints and seemingly insurmountable odds, unlike the “experts” who tend to focus on complexities and constraints. Premiers Begin, Rabin, Barak, Sharon and Olmert adopted radically new positions on the peace process almost solely on their

own initiative.

Limited “checks and balances”

In a parliamentary system, by definition, the *Knesset’s* ability to impose “checks and balances” and to play an effective oversight role is highly limited. The NSS, MoD and MFA, even the IDF Planning Branch, lack the bureaucratic stature to serve as an effective curb against excessive individual preference, haste, or whim on the part of decision-makers. Nor, in a democracy, is this their appropriate role. The only “checks and balances” remaining are thus the political process, including the need for Cabinet approval and public opinion and, ultimately, the judicial system. All can be effective means of curbing excess – but usually only post facto, after essential parts of a policy have been formulated and even implemented.

Deficient policy integration and coordination

As the issues facing Israel have become increasingly complex and the national security bureaucracy has grown in size, the need for more effective inter-agency coordination has assumed greater urgency. Despite the establishment of the NSS, however, the inter-agency machinery has not kept pace. A pathology common to governments everywhere, the problem in Israel is exacerbated by the informal nature of decision-making, fear of leaks and politicization. In recent years, this has been further compounded by the establishment of essentially superfluous ministries, for reasons of coalition politics, such as the ministries of strategic affairs and intelligence; and the partly overlapping roles of the national security adviser, the premier’s military secretary and foreign affairs adviser and the appointment of special emissaries in some cases not even on the government payroll. To this, one must add the turf wars and budgetary battles typical of bureaucracies everywhere.

Israel’s information-gathering capabilities (the intelligence services, foreign ministry and other agencies) are highly rated as an area of national excellence. In many cases, though, there is a disconnect between the information generated and the decisions adopted, with key pieces of information either ignored, not converted into policy or giving rise to clearly incompatible decisions. The defense budget is again a case in point. Rather than seeking to maximize the benefits of budgetary alternatives for the defense establishment or for the government as a whole, the Ministry of Finance typically submits an artificially low budget proposal, the MoD invariably inflates its requirements and the outcome is a political compromise.

The above shortcomings notwithstanding, the severity of the threats Israel confronts does appear to force a degree of discipline on the system and to keep bureaucratic battles from reaching the extremes found in some countries. Moreover, the senior bureaucracy in Israel is relatively small and officials and ministers have often known each other for years, thereby helping at times to mitigate turf wars.

National security policy is usually the IDF’s position

The IDF is the most influential player in the national DMP, with by far the most developed policy assessment, formulation and implementation capabilities. In many areas, the IDF is either the sole entity capable of supplying information, analysis and policy advice to the government, or at least the principal actor. No other institution can compete with the ability of the IDF’s

Intelligence, Planning and Operations Branches to generate rapid and sophisticated policy support around the clock.

Notwithstanding the IDF's influence, some historic decisions have been made over its objections or even without its knowledge. Begin, known for his deep veneration of the IDF, did not inform it of the inception of the peace talks with Egypt, nor did Rabin reveal the secret of the Oslo talks. Begin decided to attack the Iraqi reactor in 1981 over the objections of Military Intelligence. Barak withdrew from Lebanon in 2000 despite IDF opposition. Sharon decided to withdraw from Gaza without consulting the IDF, as did Olmert regarding the 2006 West Bank Convergence Plan.

The IDF is thus neither omnipotent nor must it be so to substantiate its primacy in the DMP. Its standing is based not on "winning" every issue, but merely on being the most important player in most security deliberations.

Interestingly, the IDF is often a voice for moderation, stressing the importance of diplomatic rather than military options. Starting in the late 1980s, it was the IDF that urged an effort be made to reach peace with the Palestinians, Jordan and Syria, despite the concessions required, and to affect a broader change in Israel's relations with the Arab world. It was the IDF that insisted only a political solution could end the first *Intifada*. When the Camp David Summit collapsed in 2000 and the second *Intifada* erupted, the IDF quickly made a conceptual turnaround and adopted a more hardline approach, only to then conclude once again three years later that the core conflict could only be terminated, if at all, through a negotiated settlement.¹¹

By its very nature as a military organization, the IDF cannot take the place of a robust and effective MFA and NSS. Although the Planning Branch seeks to adopt a broad national perspective, it is inherently a subordinate IDF organ and views issues primarily through a military prism. The Planning Branch often recommends diplomatic options, but military considerations obviously receive great attention, and it can hardly be expected to weigh the defense budget in terms of overall national needs at the expense of those of the IDF. Bound by the strictures of a military organization in a democracy, there are also limits to its ability to weigh the social and economic issues that impact on defense policy, not to mention political considerations that are an integral part of Cabinet-level decision-making.

The IDF's highly developed policy assessment, planning and implementation capabilities are a vital national asset. It is the weakness of the Cabinet's policy formulation capabilities and of the civilian national security organs, primarily the MFA, MoD and NSS, that is the true problem and which provide the IDF with inordinate influence, thereby skewing the entire DMP.¹²

Systemic overload

The entire national security establishment is under tremendous pressure, due to the gap between the vast number of demands placed on it and the limited resources available. Despite considerable strengthening – both qualitatively and quantitatively – of the national security agencies in recent decades, capabilities remain taut. Put simply, the problem is too few people facing too many demands, and lacking time to gain true expertise in the constantly changing array of issues they face.

Highly porous civil–military boundaries

The national security establishment, as noted, is comparatively small, thereby facilitating a

common understanding of the issues and creating a high level of personal and professional intimacy. Perhaps most importantly, this situation enables easy and rapid communication through a network of personal ties that cut through organizations and levels of bureaucracy.

The Israeli national security establishment, like all organizations, has its own norms and ways of thinking. It is not, however, a closed military elite removed from broader societal trends. The IDF is primarily a conscript and reservist army, and its regular personnel and their families are fully integrated within Israeli society, shopping, recreating, sending children to school and spouses to work and sharing the feelings and tribulations of the broader population. Officers retire at relatively young ages, thus facilitating the inflow of new ideas while reducing the danger posed by long-entrenched mindsets.

External scrutiny as a corrective mechanism

Israel's Supreme Court intervenes in national security decisions as do few judiciaries in the world. The national security establishment is in continuous contact with the international community at all levels – political, military, diplomatic, scientific and otherwise – exposing it to an ongoing flow of ideas, feedback and constraints. Intensive exchanges with friendly governments, or individual leaders and officials, are also a constant input. Indeed, so extensive are intelligence and policy exchanges with the US, that Washington's policymaking capabilities almost become an extension of Israel's, exposing it to additional approaches and options, but also imposing constraints. Israel is endlessly analyzed and often censured by the domestic and international media alike, which serves as yet another means for gauging reactions to any given policy.

Conclusion

In celebrating its 70th anniversary, Israel can look back with satisfaction at its many achievements, despite unusually adverse circumstances. Yet after decades in which the national decision-making process has served Israeli national security well, it is increasingly hard pressed to continue doing so.

An "objective," or at least fair measure of success, is certainly not some individual analyst's assessment of the outcome of a decision-making process, including not this author's. A far more effective measure is whether the specific decision-maker actually succeeded in achieving the objectives he or she set out at the beginning of a DMP, taking into account that unforeseen, or controllable events, can derail even the most effective policymaking.

In recent decades, the number of cases that have failed to meet this measure has become untenable. To mention just a few examples, none of the major rounds of conflict with *Hamas* and *Hizbullah* since the 1980s met the initial objectives, and it is debatable whether the unilateral withdrawals from Lebanon and Gaza achieved the goals envisioned. Repeated attempts to achieve peace with the Palestinians failed, even though Israel conducted a near "textbook" DMP in at least one case (the preparations Barak conducted during the negotiations in 2000),¹³ thereby proving that an effective process does not necessarily guarantee the desired outcomes. Netanyahu's efforts to block the Iranian nuclear program ended with a US brokered agreement that he termed a threat to Israel's existence. These failures are particularly disturbing because the initiative was largely in Israel's hands and it could have set achievable objectives.

Clearly, something has to change. The question is what. To answer, it is necessary to recount the three causal variables presented at the beginning of the chapter: Israel's uniquely hostile external environment, its proportional representation electoral system, and the IDF and defense establishment's predominance.

Israel could improve its international standing significantly were it to adopt different policies in regard to the West Bank, and in so doing alleviate a variety of other major national security challenges, as well. Nevertheless, peace does not depend on Israel alone; the Middle Eastern geopolitical environment remains extraordinarily harsh, and prospects for a fundamental improvement are bleak. Clearly, the solution to Israel's decision-making difficulties does not lie in this realm.

Similarly, with respect to Israel's form of government, countries are loath to change their electoral systems and do so rarely, generally only in times of crisis. Israel has already tried electoral reform, conducting two elections under a new system in the 1990s, only to return to the previous one. Having gone through a failed reform, prospects for revising the system again are low, at least in the foreseeable future. Which only leaves the imbalance between the defense and civilian agencies of the national security establishment.

In the more than four decades since the 1973 Yom Kippur War Israel's national security apparatus has been transformed in both size and sophistication. It will require additional time and effort, however, to redress the existing asymmetries between, on the one hand, the civilian national security agencies represented by the NSS, MoD and MFA, and, on the other hand, the sprawling, powerful defense establishment, especially the IDF. Israel now possesses all of the agencies and instruments necessary for sophisticated decision-making. The question is whether its current and future leadership will make wise and effective use of them.

Finally, none of the decision-making ills described in this chapter are unique to Israel; indeed, readers familiar with many other governmental systems will find much in common. What makes Israel different is two-fold. First, the severity with which some of these failings are manifested and second, Israel's strategic circumstances, which make the price it pays for them unacceptable.

Notes

- 1 Itai Brun, lecture at Annual Herzliya Conference, Israel, June 10, 2014; Amos Harel, *Ha'aretz*, May 29, 2015; Ya'akov Amidror, "The Terrorist Defense Force," *BESA Perspectives*. Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University, January 2015, p. 281.
- 2 Avi Kober, *Israel's Wars of Attrition: Attrition Challenges to Democratic States*. London: Routledge, 2009, p. 43; Efraim Lavie. "How Israel Coped With the Intifada: A Critical Examination," *Strategic Assessment* 13 (2010): 87–104; Daniel Byman, *A High Price: The Triumphs and Failures of Israeli Counterterrorism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 140; Efraim Inbar, "Israel's Small War: The Military Response to the Intifada," *Armed Forces & Society* 18 (1991): 29–50.
- 3 Byman, *A High Price*, p. 372.
- 4 Charles D. Freilich, *Israeli National Security: A New Strategy for an Era of Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, Chapter 10. See also Chapter 16 below.
- 5 Jeffrey Heller and Stephen Kalin, "Israeli Minister Reveals Covert Contacts With Saudi Arabia," *Reuters*, November 19, 2017.
- 6 Charles D. Freilich, *Zion's Dilemmas: How Israel Makes National Security Policy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012, pp. 100–121.
- 7 Uzi Dayan interview May 23, 2006; Ben Caspit, *Maariv* (Hebrew Daily), May 15, 2006.
- 8 Barak Ravid, *Ha'aretz* (Hebrew Daily), September 1, 2007; Uzi Dayan, *Conference, Jerusalem Institute for Israel Affairs*, December 25, 2006.
- 9 Freilich, *Zion's Dilemmas*, p. 48.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 233–234.
- 11 Yoram Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room: How the Military Shapes Israeli Policy*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2006, pp. 36, 213; Zeev Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land: A Critical Analysis of Israel's Security and Foreign Policy*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2006, pp. 522–523.

- 12 Dan Meridor interview, May 30, 2006; Silvan Shalom interview, June 13, 2006; Peri, *Generals in the Cabinet Room*, p. 51; Yoram Turbovich, "Testimony Before the Winograd Commission," December 27, 2006, p. 3. www.vaadatwino.gov.il/pdf/%D7%A%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%9C%20%D7%99%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%9D? Maoz, *Defending the Holy Land*, pp. 501, 527.
- 13 Freilich, *Zion's Dilemmas*, pp. 154–176.

13

The dynamics of civil–military relations and the complexity of Israel’s security policies

Yagil Levy

This essay divides into three sections. The first explains how civilian control of the military in Israel has shifted over time from an institutional to an extra-institutional mode. The second analyzes the cyclical pattern from militarization and demilitarization to remilitarization, while the third illustrates how tensions caused by the simultaneous development of the preceding two processes have created contradictions in Israel’s civil–military relations.

Civilian control – from institutional to extra-institutional

The principle of political supervision over the military was confirmed in Israel even before the formal establishment of the state in 1948, with the subordination of underground paramilitary organizations to the authority of Jewish political institutions, on which they depended for both material and human resources (volunteers).¹ The relationship thus established enabled the young state to realize its monopolist control of the means of violence in 1948, by dismantling the pre-state underground organizations and integrating them into the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

Notwithstanding this relatively smooth transition, friction between politicians and generals surfaced during the state’s first decade, most notably, when reprisal raids by the IDF against neighboring Arab countries were undertaken independently, and at times, in direct defiance of Defense Minister Pinhas Lavon and Prime Minister Moshe Sharett, both temporary successors to the first prime minister and defense minister, David Ben-Gurion.²

Even so, the supremacy of civilian political leaders over generals was ensured, owing in part to exchange relationships, with the military accepting unquestioned civilian authority in exchange for huge material, budgetary and human resources that allowed the IDF to maintain a massive, long-term buildup, arguably exceeding the direct needs of the early 1950s. For their part, politicians internalized military perspectives on how to confront the perceived Arab threat.³ Consequently, the IDF relationship with politicians was marked by partnership – rather than instrumental obedience – in the co-shaping of defense policies.⁴ Furthermore, owing to the permeable boundaries between the military and society, typified by a “nation in arms,” the IDF was partly civilianized, and thus its freedom of action was restricted, and so also its inclination to resist civilian control.⁵

In May 1967, however, disputes about how to respond to Egypt's transfer of considerable forces into the Sinai Peninsula on Israel's southern border, and closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, seriously challenged civilian control. Senior IDF officers exerted heavy behind-the-scenes pressure on then Prime Minister and Defense Minister Levi Eshkol to launch a preemptive war against Egypt, even as Eshkol sought to resolve the crisis through diplomacy. Subjected to increasing pressure, Eshkol ultimately relinquished control over the defense portfolio to Moshe Dayan, the acclaimed former Chief of the General Staff, and the cabinet granted approval to strike.

This episode signaled that the generals (who some observers considered close to revolt) might be changing the terms of the partnership and attempting to dictate policy. In fact, however, the Eshkol government still delayed authorizing the military offensive until diplomacy patently failed, and the United States signaled support for an Israeli preemptive attack.⁶ After the war, political supervision of the military was further consolidated, largely due to the entry into politics of several retired senior officers. Besides weakening possible motives for subversive conduct of generals in uniform, this process also enhanced political control over IDF operational conduct, which would now be scrutinized by ex-generals in the Cabinet and the *Knesset*.⁷

In subsequent years, three successive legislative acts served to formalize the civilian–military hierarchy. First, “Basic Law: The Military,” passed in 1976, removed ambiguity about the legal status of the IDF by clearly asserting the military's subordination to the government.⁸ Second, the 1992 amendment to “Basic Law: The Government,” enacted following public accusations that Defense Minister Ariel Sharon had knowingly misled the Cabinet into launching a full-scale Lebanon War in 1982, rather than the authorized limited operation.⁹ Article 51(a) of the 1992 revised law now specified that the state may initiate a war only pursuant to a government decision. Third, “Basic Law: The State Economy” was modified in 1983 so that it now required proposed defense budgets to be reviewed by a joint commission of two *Knesset* committees – Finance, and Foreign Affairs and Defense¹⁰ – thus enhancing parliamentary oversight of the defense sector.

I am not claiming that the institutional mechanisms were completely effective. However, there has been no recurrence of incidents like those that occurred during the 1950s and in 1967, when generals directly resisted the authority of civilian leaders. But frictions did occur, as was amply demonstrated throughout the second *Intifada*, which erupted in 2000 following the failure to reach a final Israel–Palestinian peace agreement as prescribed by the 1993 Oslo Accords. At that time, the IDF acted as a principal decision-maker regarding Israel's conduct in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and more than once, created “facts on the ground.”¹¹

Institutional mechanisms of civilian control over the military have been further reinforced since the 1970s by extra-institutional mechanisms, backed by a more subversive media. Extra-institutional control mechanisms are used by non-bureaucratic actors – mainly social movements and interest groups – acting in the public sphere and attempting to bargain with the military or restrain it, either directly or through civilian state institutions.¹² Similar to other forms of collective action, extra-institutional actors in the military realm emerged when, in both the 1973 (Yom Kippur) War, and the first Lebanon War (1982–1985), the citizenry remained out of the circle of control and left the politicians and the generals with wide-ranging autonomy to shape and implement a flawed military doctrine.¹³ A new political space opened up to collective actors from the left and right alike, who challenged previously consensual military policies.¹⁴ Concurrently, the declining legitimacy of military sacrifice (see more below) empowered the

sacrificing groups vis-à-vis the IDF and the government, and encouraged their involvement in controlling the military.

Extra-institutional conduct is manifest in several arenas and takes various forms.¹⁵ (1) *Direct bargaining* is typified by rabbis bargaining with the military over the terms of service of religious conscripts regarding issues such as dietary regulations and service with women. Another example is control over national security and defense policies exercised by policy networks composed of currently serving and former security personnel and their civilian partners.¹⁶ (2) *The public arena* is used as a venue where demonstrations, lobbying, assemblies, the publicizing of information and actions in the legislative area take place. Examples include middle-class antiwar movements such as Peace Now and, especially, Four Mothers (see below), organizations of reservists and feminist NGOs lobbying for increased gender equality in the ranks (3) *The judicial arena* is used principally by civil rights organizations who petition Israel's Supreme Court in attempts to restrain IDF activity in the West Bank, where the Palestinian population is subject to direct and indirect military control, and in the Gaza Strip (until 2005). (4) *The direct control arena* is where civil rights organizations directly monitor IDF activities. One example is Machsom Watch, a civil rights movement composed exclusively of women seeking to curb abuse of Palestinians by monitoring military conduct at West Bank checkpoints.

As part of this pattern of direct control, "control from within" emerged as well. When tasked with implementing politically sensitive missions with which they disagree, some soldiers, motivated by prior ideological agendas, intentionally attempt to influence military policies. These attempts may be either direct or indirect, and synchronous (in real time) or asynchronous (post factum but with the goal of affecting future or ongoing policies). Among the forms of control from within are restraining or encouraging the aggressiveness of other soldiers, whistle blowing, selective and gray refusal to deploy, foot-dragging, collective bargaining concerning deployments and documentation and testimonies. One of the best-known examples of this mechanism is the Breaking the Silence organization, a group of reservists who document the testimonies of soldiers about misconduct in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹⁷

In effect, extra-institutional control has restricted the autonomy of both the military and its institutional political masters.¹⁸ Furthermore, demands by collective actors stimulating parliamentary legislation have worked to re-enhance institutional control mechanisms.¹⁹ However, the military has retained its autonomy in the critical realms of strategic planning and the consequent definition of war goals, force construction and armament programs, about which the political echelon has studiously refrained from issuing clear directives from at least the 1970s on.²⁰

Militarization, demilitarization and remilitarization

Enhancement of civilian control of the military has been accompanied – and affected – by sequential processes of militarization, demilitarization and remilitarization.

Historically, Israeli political culture was militarized from the early years of the Jewish community until the 1970s.²¹ Militarization developed through three main phases. First, acceptance of the use of force as a legitimate political instrument during the pre-state period (1920–1948), subsequent to the confrontation between pacifism and activism. Second, prioritization of the military approach over political–diplomatic methods during the state's first years, until phase three, when military discourse gradually predominated after the 1967 War and

the resulting expansion of borders. Each stage was accompanied by the gradual intensification of resources devoted to war preparations and the strengthening of force-oriented preferences reflected in foreign policies. Consequently, previously debated issues gradually became a point of departure rather than a matter of debate, increasingly narrowing the boundaries of political discourse. However, at the same time, and somewhat paradoxically, civilian control increased as well. This was accomplished by increasing the capacity of the civilian institutions of the state (and the pre-states ones) to extract resources and mobilize legitimacy for a military buildup, which it exchanged, as mentioned above, for greater civilian control over the IDF.²²

The 1973 War marked the turning point toward demilitarization. Israel was surprised by an Egyptian–Syrian attack that was barely repelled at the cost of some 2,500 fatalities. This war disabused the public perception that military superiority could obviate the need for territorial concessions, which Israel had been reluctant to consider following the 1967 war.²³ As an extra-institutional actor, Peace Now, a movement established in 1978 by middle-class reserve officers, helped to mobilize support for the alternative policy of removing even existential threats by diplomatic means. This perceptible shift found expression in the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt, after which Israel withdrew from the entire Sinai Peninsula it had conquered in 1967.

More significant was the first Lebanon War (1982), sold to the public as a “short-term” military operation. Once it became apparent that Israel was resorting to force in order to reshape internal Lebanese politics, an objective that prolonged the fighting and necessitated an extended siege of Beirut in July and August 1982, antiwar demonstrations erupted. For the very first time, criteria for legitimizing the use of force became subjects of debate, with protest groups focusing on the goals of the war, which was categorized as one of “choice” and, therefore, distinct from the “wars of no choice” Israel had previously waged.²⁴ In 1985, largely due to further antiwar protests, the IDF unilaterally withdrew from parts of Lebanon.²⁵

This war had a major impact on the legitimacy of using force. Clearly, as political disputes over the use of military force intensified, as was the case with Lebanon, the legitimacy of using force declined. Political and military leaders had to calculate carefully the expected political outcomes, including cohesiveness of the ranks, into which the political disputes diffused. Having learned these lessons, the restrained use of military force, along with considerations of international politics, was reflected in the relatively moderate policy adopted by the government during the first *Intifada* that erupted in 1987 as the first Palestinian uprising against Israel’s rule in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. A reluctance to use massive firepower to quell the uprising of the Palestinians, who did not bear firearms, was quite evident. Israel gradually internalized the limitations of using force, in sharp contrast to the sense of omnipotence inherent within Israeli political thought until the 1973 war. Restraint paved the road to the Oslo Accords of 1993–1995 between Israel and the PLO, through which control over part of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was gradually handed over to the newly established Palestinian Authority.²⁶

Military failures and shortfalls in the 1973 War and in the Lebanese and Palestinian arenas eroded the image of the invincible Israeli combatant. Furthermore, politics reflected, as much as nurtured, cultural demilitarization, a major manifestation of which was the appearance of multiple forms of resistance to military sacrifice. Until the 1970s, the legitimacy of sacrificing was extremely high. The hegemonic bereavement model dominated the public discourse, according to which, death in war was presented as the norm, and casualties were depicted as heroes defending Israel against threats to its very existence. Bereaved parents, therefore, accepted their losses with pride.²⁷ The first Lebanon War marked a turning point, after which parents and reserve soldiers protested against the loss of life by voicing a subversive

bereavement discourse. As never before, antiwar groups demanded that a soldier's ultimate sacrifice be made for a just cause, as when the state has no choice but to go to war, thus raising the threshold for deploying troops.

Other factors further reduced the legitimacy of sacrifice in war: the declining perception of external threats,²⁸ the ascendancy of a market society encouraged by Israel's exposure to globalization and the post-1973 spiraling military expenditures that were not offset by any commensurate war-produced economic gains. This combination challenged longstanding collectivist commitments and traditional symbols of virtually unquestioned national patriotism. Furthermore, the 1977 political upheaval, which saw the rightist *Likud* Party oust the Labor Party from power for the first time in Israel's history, empowered Jewish religious and Mizrahi (immigrants from Arab countries) groups at the expense of secular middle-class Ashkenazim (Jews of European descent). The latter, traditionally the social backbone of the IDF, had previously been able to convert their prominence in the military into social and political dominance. Now, the loss of prestige suffered by the IDF in 1973 precluded that trade-off and, by implication, affected the motivation of this group to sacrifice.²⁹

The decline in the willingness to sacrifice climaxed in 2000, when Israel unilaterally withdrew from the "security zone" in southern Lebanon, to which it had largely removed its forces in 1985, thereby entirely evacuating that country. This step followed a protracted counter-guerrilla campaign waged against *Hizbullah* forces, during which more than 300 IDF soldiers were killed. The turning point was in February 1997, when two military helicopters collided en route to Lebanon, killing 73 soldiers. In response, the Four Mothers movement was founded by mothers from the middle-class who had sons serving in Lebanon. Four Mothers led the campaign to pull out of Lebanon unilaterally and unconditionally. In its discourse, the movement challenged the costs of the deployment and its political and military logic. Ultimately, the campaign played a key role in shifting public opinion and driving the Israeli government to withdraw troops unilaterally from Lebanon in 2000.³⁰ Most significant, this cost-centered discourse created a new cultural barrier to sacrifice in the form of the "Lebanon phobia." This barrier would be reflected in the second Lebanon War (2006), during which Israel refrained, until the last moment, from deploying ground forces into Lebanon to clear out the missile launchers from which *Hizbullah* fired on Israeli civilian communities.³¹

In summary, motivated by an ideological agenda or an aversion to sacrifice, extra-institutional actors played a key role, not only in supervising the IDF, but also in promoting demilitarization.

This trend towards demilitarization came to an abrupt halt in September 2000, with the outbreak of the second *Intifada* that ushered in a process of remilitarization. Unlike the first *Intifada*, this time the Palestinians employed firepower against IDF forces and gradually against civilian targets as well. Increasingly, Israel intensified attacks against Palestinian headquarters, militias and civilian infrastructures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and in 2002 reoccupied major West Bank cities.

In 2005, Israel, under Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip, dismantling all Jewish settlements in the Strip in hopes of deflecting international pressure on Israel to make unfavorable concessions in the West Bank.³² However, *Hamas* eventually seized control over Gaza, mounting repeated rocket attacks against Israel's civilian population, thereby pushing Israel subsequently to initiate two large-scale military campaigns.

The remilitarization process was further facilitated by restructuring of the IDF, a process that began in the 1980s. Whether intentional or not, this enabled the military to reclaim the latitude to deploy troops, even in the face of dissident voices by the politically active secular middle class.

The most important features of restructuring were:³³

- 1 Adoption of a counter-fire doctrine, first implemented during the 1990s in Lebanon, premised on standoff precision armaments (artillery, fighter aircraft, and gradually, drones). The combatants' exposure to risk was thereby reduced, while shifting the risk to enemy noncombatants by using standoff munitions with relatively limited discrimination between combatants and noncombatants.³⁴
- 2 Removal of reservists from friction zones. Reservists, being more politically active and casualty-sensitive, are more likely than regular conscripts to engage in political protests.³⁵
- 3 Realignment of the social composition of field units. This was accomplished by encouraging the integration of soldiers from lower-class and religious groups who still regarded military service as a track for upward mobility. The service attracted Mizrachim, immigrants, mainly from the former Soviet Union and from Ethiopia, women (who until the 1990s were excluded from combat roles) and most importantly, religious enlistees.

For many religious soldiers, carrying out the mission of renewing Jewish control over what they perceived as holy land, primarily the occupied West Bank, was their main symbolic return for military service. To help them avoid secularization during military service, the IDF offered the religious conscripts special tracks: *yeshivot hesder* (literally "arrangement academies"), which combined Torah study in a *yeshiva* with military service in homogeneously religious frameworks in combat units, or pre-military academies (*mechinot*), meant to religiously prepare religious draftees before their service. Therefore, the religious groups could change their previously marginalized status in both the military and society. Through this re-architecting, the military was able to draw on a pool of ideologically motivated soldiers, those loyal to military thought and willing to sacrifice, who would not mobilize their social networks to protest military policies, as the secular middle class had done.

The steep drop in the proportion of secular middle-class casualties from about 68.5% during the first week of the First Lebanon War to about 45.5% in the second *Intifada*, matched by casualties from the lower-class rising by similar proportions, clearly reflected the IDF's new social makeup. The Second Lebanon War in 2006 further confirmed this trend, while also mirroring changes in attitudes toward bereavement, which now assumed a more submissive tone. Because the proportion of fatalities among upper middle-class regulars and reservists was relatively small, critics of that campaign failed to generate a critical mass for effective political protest.³⁶ A similar pattern occurred during Operation Protective Edge in Gaza in 2014, when 65 IDF soldiers were killed, mostly in flawed attempts to destroy tunnels leading from Gaza into Israel. Here again, despite revelations of command incompetence, the tone of bereavement continued to be private, contained and deferential.³⁷

Since the 2000s, increased tolerance of sacrifice has been accompanied and supported by cultural remilitarization. Unlike the 1980s and 1990s, legitimacy for the use of force has solidified. With the potentially antiwar middle class partly distanced from the risks of war, fewer voices have had an interest in challenging the use of force with the sacrifices entailed. Moreover, as buses exploded in Israel's cities during the second *Intifada*, acceptance of the use of force grew, without an effective antiwar protest emerging from the Israeli center-left.³⁸ Without the balancing impact of this camp, an ethno-nationalist political coalition composed of right-wing and religious groups, for whom the 1967 occupation was a stimulus to reassert their identification with Jewish tradition, gained increasing power that further enhanced the

militarized camp.³⁹

Politically, this shift was clearly demonstrated by the election of the rightist Ariel Sharon as Israel's prime minister in 2001. In terms of public opinion, the "Oslo Index," measuring support for the Oslo Agreements and belief in their ability to bring about peace between Israel and the Palestinians, dropped from 45.3 points in August 2000, on the eve of the second *Intifada*, to an average of about 35 points in 2001, and to about 33 points in 2002.⁴⁰ While in 1996, at the peak of the Oslo process, 36% of Jewish respondents identified themselves with the left, only 27% did so in 2003. Meanwhile, identification with the right rose from 39% to 52%.⁴¹

Gradually, a new mechanism was engaged – the religionization of politics.⁴² Against this background, the ongoing friction with the Palestinians in the West Bank and Israel's wars in Gaza could be presented as a religious war, accompanied by the dehumanization of the Palestinians. With the empowerment of military chaplains, this sentiment diffused into the military ranks.⁴³

Gaps and contradictions in civil–military relations

Until the 2000s, militarization and demilitarization promoted civilian control. Remilitarization, however, exposed new gaps and contradictions. While institutional and extra-institutional control of the military both increased and restricted the military's freedom of operation, remilitarization encouraged politicians more freely to deploy the military for what previously were debated missions. Operation Protective Edge, launched in the summer of 2014 against the *Hamas*-ruled Gaza Strip, illustrates this process. In testimony subsequently presented to Israel's State Comptroller, the IDF asserted that neither side had an interest in initiating such a large-scale conflict.⁴⁴ In fact, the escalatory process preceding this operation had assumed a life of its own, triggered by *Hamas* operatives kidnapping three Jewish teenagers in the West Bank. In response, the IDF searched for the victims in that area, during which operation several *Hamas* activists were arrested. The shocking discovery that the three boys had been murdered led to a public discourse reactivating past Jewish traumas evoking sentiments extending well beyond both the immediate kidnapping and the direct conflict with the Palestinians.⁴⁵ This helped mute antiwar voices, imposing a "rhetorical coercion."⁴⁶

Remilitarization that encourages military aggressiveness, has not, however, been fully aligned with reducing the legitimacy of sacrificing for this purpose. Though the military and the politicians reduced the risk imposed on Israeli soldiers, especially those drawn from upper middle-class groups, the economic sacrifices remained high, which led to declining tolerance for large military expenditures by taxpayers. Dissatisfaction with the IDF's flawed performance in Lebanon and Gaza, despite the enormous investment in military capabilities, together with a widespread desire to trim taxation and shift government spending toward social welfare, were reflected in a 2015 poll which showed that about 41% of Jewish Israelis thought too much of the state budget was devoted to defense. For the first time, moreover, most Israelis gave the IDF's administrative and organizational capacities a far lower grade than its military capabilities.⁴⁷ Public criticism has prompted the IDF to introduce a multi-year efficiency plan based upon careful strategic planning and premised on the assumption that the Israeli public no longer tolerates gradual escalations leading to prolonged campaigns. This may necessitate the application of overwhelming military power at the outset in order to end any military conflict

decisively and swiftly.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, gaps between the public's support for using force in dealing with political conflicts and the drop in its readiness to sacrifice for war has created certain tensions in civil–military relations.

Furthermore, the public expectation for intense but brief conflicts is at odds with the professional military's concern at being dragged into armed conflicts the military cannot win either quickly or decisively. Since the 1980s, this has increasingly been the case in asymmetric clashes with non-state actors such as *Hizbullah* and *Hamas*. Tellingly, in 2015–2016, IDF commanders were the ones calling for greater restraint in the West Bank and Gaza, and for acceptance of the nuclear deal concluded in 2015 between Iran and the powers. By limiting military campaigns to those situations where political alternatives had been exhausted, and when Israel's security was clearly and directly at risk, the IDF command was seeking to ensure both domestic and international legitimacy for applying overwhelming force as a last resort. However, by taking this approach, the IDF also harmed its own reputation, as right-wing groups accused it of weakness.⁴⁹

In addition, the threatened loss of motivation for military sacrifice among upper-middle-class groups⁵⁰ has accelerated the legitimacy crisis of the draft system. The decline in motivation to serve has been intertwined with an increasing selectivity in conscription that has become more transparent to the public and has thus undermined the previously cherished principles of equality and fairness in conscription. For example, the proportion of potential male draftees who performed no military service whatsoever rose from 25% in 2007 to 28% in 2016,⁵¹ and this trend has continued in 2017 and concerned the IDF.⁵² It has responded by increasing soldiers' pay and introducing monetary differentials that favor those serving in combat roles,⁵³ along with responding to economic and social pressures for shortening mandatory military service for men from 36 to 32 months. It has also attempted to both integrate more women into combat roles and to recruit more ultra-Orthodox enlistees.⁵⁴ The legitimacy crisis has, for the first time, created an environment favoring gradual abolition of the compulsory universal draft⁵⁵ which, for the IDF, may mark a farewell from its status as the “people's army,” a universal organization symbolizing the nation's unity and identity.

Most significantly, remilitarization, entwined with selectivity and the recruitment crisis, has promoted conflicts over the IDF's identity, ethos and values. Two such noteworthy controversies surfaced in the course of 2016–2017. The first conflict between the IDF and the national–religious sector concerned several issues. These included: mixed-gender units; the increase in voluntary enlistment of religious women (who are exempt from service for religious reasons); the IDF's efforts to curtail the empowerment and expanded educational role of the military rabbinate; the allegedly liberal values of the military education system; and disputes over the rules of engagement with charges that the IDF favored the lives of enemy noncombatants over those of its own soldiers.⁵⁶ Beneath the surface of this conflict, however, was the national–religious agenda to reshape the IDF's culture and policies.

Since the late 1980s, the presence of religious conscripts has grown significantly. Nevertheless, the 2005 withdrawal from Gaza, with the removal of its 8,000 Jewish settlers, threatened to demolish the settlement project in the West Bank, returning religious Zionism to the status of just another sector in society, rather than the sector leading a major national project.⁵⁷ This was especially so due to a post-disengagement focus shift from Gaza to the West Bank, where resolving the Israeli–Palestinian conflict would require the mass dismantling of Jewish settlements.

Thanks to special compromises, the IDF overcame the calls by leading rabbis to religious soldiers to disobey orders to dismantle the settlements in Gaza. However, following the withdrawal, the rabbis, heads of the *hesder yeshivot* and pre-military academies, developed an agenda of increasing the critical mass of religious soldiers to limit the military's capacity to deploy troops to dismantle settlements.⁵⁸ For example, Rabbi Eli Sadan, the founder of the pre-military academy project, called upon religious youngsters to join the military ranks, the secret services and the police to develop the infrastructure for the "ideal state."⁵⁹ Indeed, the number of students enrolling in pre-military academies grew by 30% during the years 2005–2012.⁶⁰ A critical mass of religious soldiers translated into an increase in the rabbis' bargaining power vis-à-vis the military over issues such as the integration of women, the status of the military rabbinate and religious soldiers' rights, along with restricting the IDF's deployment of soldiers to dismantle illegal settlements in the West Bank (evictions ordered by the Israeli High Court of Justice).⁶¹ Thus, fears that cultural changes within the IDF (such as gender integration) might weaken national-religious influence within the ranks and prevent the creation of a critical mass of religious combatants prompted religious leaders to raise their voices, resulting in conflicts between the military and leading rabbis.

The second controversy over the IDF's identity arose after a conscript soldier on active service, Elor Azaria, was filmed shooting and killing an immobilized Palestinian attacker (Abd al-Fattah Yusri al-Sharif) in the West Bank city of Hebron in March 2016. The IDF's decision to bring the soldier to trial for manslaughter and the refusal to pardon him provoked unprecedented protests by right-wing, not necessarily religious, Israelis, who accused the IDF command of abandoning a soldier who, they claimed, had acted in self-defense. The prevailing atmosphere of remilitarization was further indicated by polls in October 2015 (before the shooting), showing that 53% of Jewish interviewees agreed with the statement, "Any Palestinian who has perpetrated a terror attack against Jews should be killed on the spot, even if he has been apprehended and no longer poses a threat."⁶² Once trial proceedings began, social networks also began associating the trial with the Mizrahi origins of Azaria and his main vocal supporters,⁶³ thus generating inter-cultural friction. No wonder that divisions emerged between IDF commanders and civilian sectors: in July 2016, polls showed that among the "hard right," about half do not see concordance between the IDF senior command's values and those of the general public.⁶⁴

To a large extent the Azaria affair reflects the fundamental structural change that, since the early 2000s, has led to the gradual creation of two armies within the IDF. A "policing" force, operating in the West Bank, has emerged alongside the "official" army. The former, although apparently subordinated to political authority, has become a quasi-militia, setting policy that may deviate from official policy. Ostensibly, its task is law enforcement in the West Bank, but its troops are primarily committed to providing security to the settlers, thus reinforcing their presence and serving their ideological-political interests. Boundaries between the army units and the settlers' communities, in general, and their local armed militias, in particular, are blurred, allowing for flexible interpretations of the rules of engagement. In addition, decentralization of operational management endows low-level military commanders with considerable autonomy and the ability to influence major political outcomes.⁶⁵ This gray area constitutes the context in which Azaria shot his target, and was supported for doing so.

Both of these clashes signify how selectivity and remilitarization have bred conflicts for control over the IDF. In both cases, groups previously marginalized from the combat core of the

military, but who became prominent in units engaged in combat, and particularly in “dirty” West Bank policing missions, harbor expectations of re-shaping the IDF’s identity, ethos and culture. Selectivity in the draft has reinforced the bargaining power of the groups that do serve (especially the organized religious ones) and their desire to translate their military burden into power, while inevitably delegitimizing the old secular elites who are often publicly portrayed as shirking their duty. Within this agenda, demands were voiced for the state’s protection of soldiers accused (by the legal apparatus controlled by the “old elites”) of unlawful conduct. Similarly, expectations were raised for curbing liberal trends within the military, such as those giving undue respect to the immunity of enemy noncombatants and encouraging the equal integration of women. In particular, the religious leadership invoked new symbols drawing upon the values of remilitarization. It called on the younger generation to assume responsibility for the future of the nation and to assume the guise of a new avant-garde, in order to purge the “infection” the secular sector had left in the IDF rather than integrating within it.⁶⁶

Conclusions: the complexity of civil–military relations

As we approach 2020, the gaps and contradictions that have emerged reveal the full complexity of civil–military relations in Israel. Enhancement of civilian control clashes with remilitarization because the two processes are promoted by different sectors of Israeli society, causing two systems to collide with one another. On the one hand, the old military elite composed mainly of the Ashkenazi middle class, who also shoulder the heavier tax burden, seeks to control the military in order to promote their agenda – an agenda of preventing further investment of resources in the military; supervising its conduct in the West Bank with sensitivity to global restraints; liberalizing IDF ranks in fidelity to secular and feminist values; and reducing the burden imposed on middle-class conscripts. At the same time, lower classes and religious groups – the “new elites” – informed by a remilitarized ethno-nationalist worldview, strive to re-empower the military better to serve the nationalist agenda and to adjust the IDF’s culture and ethos accordingly. The Azaria affair exemplifies this clash between rival elites, as the civilian control promoted by the “old elites” confronts the agenda promoted by the “new elites” to save the military from those apparently destroying it.

It follows that the state is subject to conflicting pressures regarding the kind of security it should provide. In fact, three different products for protecting the state and its citizens from external aggression are at stake. Security, via a combination of diplomatic and military tools, which largely relies on international security and economic regimes, favored by large sectors of the secular middle class. Security relying mainly on force conducted in a rational manner, advocated for until 1973 by most Jewish Israelis, and largely still favored by the secular right-center, following the second *Intifada*. Security, not only as physical protection but also against threats to the Jewish identity of the state, is the standard for religious and nationalist-right groups. In this scenario, enemies can be internal as well, such as the Palestinian minority; concessions over the West Bank, perceived by some as intrinsically holy, jeopardize the Jewish identity of Israel, beyond the physical security risks.

Phasing out the draft, as the experience of other nations shows, can temper the civil–military tension. The interest of old elites in the military then wanes, as officers regain control over recruits motivated by a professional ethos, rather than by commitments to those communities from which they come. Except that, as Noam Chomsky bluntly put it, mercenary armies, under

the guise of a volunteer force, enjoy greater freedom of action to “fight a vicious, brutal, colonial war” – one that a citizen army cannot sustain for long.⁶⁷ Thus, the main challenge presently facing the IDF is to insulate the ranks of the citizen army against the political influence of social groups, rabbis and settlers. Failure to do so points Israel in the direction of a mercenary army.

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14

The diplomatic path to security

Steven R. David

All states employ diplomacy to advance national interests, the most important being security. Proceeding in four stages, this chapter addresses contemporary Israeli diplomacy and what makes it distinctive. We first consider how attributes particular to the country shape Israeli statecraft, warranting its inclusion as a “force multiplier” for security. The second section assesses how well Israeli diplomacy has actually performed, while the third examines the striking similarities between modern Israeli diplomacy and that practiced by leaders of the First and Second Jewish Commonwealths in ancient times. Having thus linked past and present practice, the chapter concludes by outlining Israeli diplomacy’s possible future challenges and prospects.

Israel’s distinctiveness

The nature and severity of threats confronting Israel clearly distinguish it from most other contemporary countries. Remarkably, however, they have much in common with those faced by the ancient Jewish polities.

Heading the list of those shared attributes is a precarious existence. Modern Israel’s very survival is called into question by a range of countries and non-state actors. The latter include groups such as *Hamas*, *Hizbullah*, Al Qaeda and ISIS, all of whom make no secret of their desire to destroy the Jewish state. Adding to Israel’s security concerns are countries wishing to do away with the Jewish state, such as Iran whose political and military leaders routinely call for Israel’s destruction in no uncertain terms.¹ Iran’s initiation of a nuclear program that may one day enable it to carry out its threats poses an especially glaring danger to Israel’s longer-term survival.

In addition, Israel faces a range of “soft” attempts to undermine the legitimacy of its existence. The United Nations is a prime venue for such efforts. Although Israel formally owes its creation to UN resolution 181, passed on November 29, 1947, the UN has thereafter demonstrated unremitting hostility to the Jewish state. Examples include the 1975 UN Resolution labeling Zionism as “a form of racism” (rescinded under American pressure in 1991) and a 1982 resolution declaring “Israel is not a peace-loving member state.” Astonishingly, of all the General Assembly resolutions that reprimand a country by name, fully three-quarters specify Israel.²

Working closely with the United Nations are a legion of NGOs (non-governmental organizations) seeking to isolate Israel. Most noteworthy is the BDS (boycott, divest and

sanction) movement, which has achieved considerable success in getting corporations, universities and entertainers to shun Israel.³ Israel is also the target of “lawfare,” the use of legal tactics to delegitimize a state. Acceptance as representatives of a member of the International Criminal Court in January 2015 has enabled Palestinians to press charges against Israelis for alleged war crimes, with the result that Israeli government officials and senior military personnel have limited travel to foreign countries for fear of being arrested. The International Court of Justice, a branch of the UN, ruled in 2013 that the security barrier Israel began to construct in 2002 to impede the movement of terrorists intent on attacking civilians, violated international law and had to be torn down (Israel ignored the ruling). Cumulatively, these actions threaten to make Israel a pariah in the international community.

Israeli diplomacy reflects the existential threats it faces.⁴ Israeli diplomats do not have the luxury of their counterparts in, say, Norway or Canada, who are free to operate in an environment in which errors or a misstep rarely have catastrophic consequences. For Israel, a diplomatic mistake can be fatal, with major implications for how diplomacy is conducted. With the stakes so high, Israeli diplomacy is crafted by a small elite group, the most important being the security cabinet.

Consisting of only a half-dozen members, this body is a subset of the larger Cabinet and typically consists of the Prime Minister and Ministers of Defense, Internal Security and Finance (others may be included as needed). The security cabinet has the expertise to deal with security threats, can act quickly, usually has the trust of the Prime Minister and presumably is less affected by the factionalism and bitter disputes marking so much of Israeli politics.

The hurly burly of Israeli democratic life, combined with constantly having to face matters of life and death, results in a diplomacy marked by restricted, closed and secret deliberations.⁵ Israel’s parliament (the *Knesset*) is far too unwieldy, faction-ridden and untrustworthy (at least for the government in power) to play an important diplomatic role. The influence exerted by political parties, pressure groups and public opinion – although not entirely negligible – is far less than in other democratic states. With its high budget allocation and expertise regarding security challenges, the Ministry of Defense is certainly a central actor in Israeli diplomacy, whereas the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, elsewhere assumed indispensable to diplomatic activity, is in Israel largely reduced to handling routine matters.

Although left out of critical matters, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs does play an important role in combating the international campaign to delegitimize Israel. Belatedly recognizing the importance of “soft power,” Israel has launched a renewed and more sophisticated effort to win the war of public opinion by targeting the young, and with a special focus on the social media. A central component of this effort is the use of public diplomacy, aimed at motivating people from other countries in the hope they in turn will influence their own government’s policies.⁶

Anti-Semitism, the power of the Arab/Muslim bloc and Israel’s own actions (expanding settlements in the West Bank, treatment of Palestinians, alleged targeting of civilians in wars) makes pressing the case for Israel a hard sell. Blunting the hatred rather than eliminating it is perhaps the most to be expected. Still, as post-war Germany shows, even a once reviled country can become one of the most admired within a generation. Thus, astute diplomacy could very well succeed in removing any threat of Israel being consigned to pariah status, especially were there to be a resolution of the Palestinian–Israeli conflict.

Israel’s second distinctive feature is its need to ally with great powers in order to preserve its security and to compensate for its demographic and territorial inferiority vis-à-vis its neighbors. This, too, has been a constant. While Israel has never had a formal alliance with any state, it has

always had a great power patron. In 1948, Israel depended on the Soviet Union, which sent critical military assistance (via Czechoslovakia), enabling it to survive invasion by five Arab states. In the 1950s and 1960s Britain and France provided much needed military support and colluded with Israel's attack on Egypt in 1956. Moreover, France supplied Israel's nuclear reactor. However, Franco-Israeli ties noticeably cooled after 1967.

The record therefore shows Israel securing alliances with strong states, only to see those alliances eventually rupturing. So Israeli officials must endlessly confront the formidable challenge of soliciting support of greater powers, even while preparing for the day that support might end.

No relationship is as important for Israel today as the one with Washington. America's contribution to Israel's defense, especially since the late 1960s, can scarcely be overstated.⁷ By helping to sustain Israel's conventional and qualitative edge in the region, and by tacitly accepting Israel's nuclear capability – thus providing it with a hedge against existential threats – the United States enables modern Israel to deter and defeat the kinds of threats that wiped its ancient forebears off the map.

On the diplomatic front, too, Washington has proven equally forthcoming. Against repeated efforts at isolating Israel, the United States has stood with Israel, often nearly alone, vetoing or modifying UN Security Council resolutions deemed one-sided, and withdrawing from UN organizations (such as UNESCO) accepting "Palestine" as a state. Similarly, the United States works to shield Israel from ostracism in other international arenas and is a major force against the BDS movement. If diplomacy is a "force multiplier" gaining security for the Jewish state, there is no better example of success than its alignment with Washington.

That being so, the greatest challenge confronting contemporary Israeli diplomacy is to maintain the relationship with the United States – and to do so at a time when the foundations on which American backing for Israel rests are weakening. The end of the Cold War diminishes the value of the strategic benefits Israel provides (a reliable ally in a turbulent area, intelligence sharing, joint development of weaponry). Furthermore, Israel's continuing occupation of the West Bank calls into question the notion that shared democratic values are what link America and Israel.

Nor can Israel depend on the "Israel Lobby" to keep the relationship strong.⁸ Bipartisan support of Israel that has served as the bedrock of the relationship shows signs of fraying, as backing for Israel increasingly becomes a Republican affair. American Jewry, too, does not speak with one voice on Israeli affairs. Groups such as J-Street openly oppose many Israeli policies and the pro-Israeli organizations (such as AIPAC) that back them. Altogether, young non-Orthodox Jews in the United States, many of them politically liberal, are not nearly as enamored of Israel as their parents. If their indifference and even hostility toward Israel persists as they assume positions of influence, Israel will have lost an important voice in its favor.⁹

Aside from being constantly threatened and always in need of great power support, Israel is distinctive for being the world's only Jewish state. This distinction carries a lot of baggage, some helpful to Israel, some not. Being a Jewish state means dealing with the world's attitudes towards Jews. Virulent criticism directed against Israel by states, international organizations and NGOs – often for behavior accepted or ignored when carried out by other countries – suggests that anti-Semitism lies at the heart of at least some of these efforts. To be sure, positive attitudes towards Jews have also benefited Israel. Thus, the support of American evangelicals, roughly 25% of the US electorate, owes a great deal to their philo-Semitism. Whatever the net balance, the impossibility of disentangling feelings about Jews from feelings toward Israel makes it

impossible for Israel to be a state like any other.

As a Jewish country, Israel's interests extend beyond its indigenous population to encompass the Jewish Diaspora. Today, notwithstanding the large numbers of Jews who have made Israel their home over the past 70 years, slightly more than half of world Jewry still resides elsewhere. As a self-proclaimed "state of the Jewish people," maintaining ties with Jewish communities throughout the world (especially in the United States) plus safeguarding threatened Jewish communities is a key part of Israel's mission. Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion acknowledged Israel's commitment to the Diaspora already in July 1950. At a meeting of Israeli ambassadors, he insisted:

So long as there exists a Jewish Diaspora ... Israel cannot behave as other states do, and take into account only its own geographic and geopolitical situation or limit its concerns to its own citizens and nationals only. Despite the fact that the Jews living abroad are in no legal way part and parcel of Israel, the whole Jewish people, wherever it resides, is the business of the State of Israel, its first and determining business. To this Israel cannot be neutral: such a neutrality would mean renouncing our links with the Jewish people.¹⁰

In practice, the existence of a Diaspora has proven to be a two-edged sword for Israeli diplomacy. On the one hand, the presence of Jews outside Israel enhances Israel's interests, with world Jewry providing a welcoming environment by facilitating international contacts and commerce. Moreover, America's Jewry influence on the United States has played a role in fostering the special relationship between the two countries. Indeed, the exaggerated belief that American Jews control American foreign policy has reportedly caused several countries (Turkey, China) to cultivate closer ties with Israel in the belief American Jews would in return press Washington to adopt favorable policies towards their countries.

However, the Diaspora can also complicate Israeli diplomacy, as was demonstrated during the Cold War, when concerns about the welfare of the sizable Jewish community in the Soviet Union inhibited development of closer ties with the USSR. Relations with South Africa (during apartheid) and several Latin American states have also been damaged because of conflicts with indigenous Jewish communities.¹¹ In particular, Argentine-Israeli relations were set back over the lack of an Argentinian response to the 1994 bombing of the Jewish community center in Buenos Aires, allegedly by Iran.

Israeli diplomacy of late has been contradictory towards the Diaspora. The establishment in 2015 of a separate Ministry of Diaspora Affairs entrusted with matters previously handled by the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization certainly signaled a new resolve. Other Israeli actions, however, have led to friction with the Diaspora, especially when confirming the sole control of the Orthodox rabbinate over religious and life-cycle affairs within Israel.

The great majority of Jews outside of Israel do not identify with Orthodoxy. In the United States, the country with the largest number of Jews except for Israel, only 10% of Jews do so, while over half designate themselves Reform or Conservative¹² – neither of which movement possesses any official standing in Israel. Should the legitimacy of non-Orthodox paths of Judaism continue to be rejected, it will take more than diplomacy to handle what is becoming a growing rift with serious repercussions for Israeli interests.

Lastly, Israel differs from other countries by being an outlier in the Middle East. A Western, Jewish, liberal democracy surrounded by Muslim, Arab autocracies, Israel is thus excluded from all regional organizations, even those promoting ostensibly non-political interactions, such as

competitive sporting events. It is not recognized by most of its neighbors, has peace agreements with only two (Egypt and Jordan) and has its right to exist openly challenged by others (Syria, Iran).

Israel's outlier status requires that all avenues be explored and has three major implications for Israeli diplomacy. First, whereas most nations pursue relations openly, Israel is driven to act secretly and to pursue backdoor diplomacy because many of its neighbors will not meet with Israeli diplomats officially or publicly, and because the diplomatic stakes are so high. Early examples are secret meetings that began in 1947–1948 with the Amir Abdullah of Trans-Jordan, and covert discussions in the 1950s on accepting reparations from Germany.¹³ Israel conducted renewed secret talks with the Jordanians between the late 1960s and late 1980s, and thereafter with the Lebanese prior to 1982, with the Palestinians in the early 1990s and more recently with the Saudis and the Gulf states.

Backdoor diplomacy provides Israel and its negotiating partners with deniability should things go awry, flexibility in offering negotiating positions politically unacceptable back home and an opportunity to exchange views with leaders who do not wish to pay the political price of openly dealing with Israel. Should Israel become less of an outlier in the Middle East and the world at large, the need for backdoor diplomacy might diminish but probably never end.

Second, as an outlier, Israeli and its diplomacy are motivated to seek “counter coalitions” with neighbors of its neighbors. Here, Israel has had some success, as when it reached out to Africa in the 1960s, providing military and economic aid to a wide range of states. The gains it achieved, however, proved ephemeral as the October 1973 War and the Arab oil weapon erased its achievements, with most African nations breaking off ties with Israel. Overtures to Iran and Turkey – two other outliers in the Middle East – also had only limited success in the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁴ The collapse of the Shah in 1979 ended Israel's relationship with Iran, while the rise to power of Recep Tayyip Erdogan after 2003 has stymied Turkish–Israeli relations. Not all setbacks prove permanent. Israel has recouped much of its past influence in Africa. Of special note are Israel's relations with Ethiopia, another regional outlier by virtue of its large Christian community. Relations with Addis Ababa were restored in 1992, and an Ethiopian-born Israeli was appointed ambassador.

Of special importance, Israel is reaching out to new partners, making inroads into India and China. Given Israel's perilous security situation, it cannot afford to invest exclusively in relationships it believes will be prolonged. For so long as they continue, close ties with states carry benefits; and, even if they unravel, the personal and institutional ties established can serve as a basis for renewing ties in the future.

Finally, Israel's outlier status helps explain the heavy emphasis on military assistance and arms sales in Israeli diplomacy. Although the precise scale of Israeli military assistance and sales remains highly classified, there is no doubt that Israel, one of the smallest states in the world, ranks among the top ten global exporters of arms and military assistance. Economic factors undoubtedly provide one explanation for this distinction. Weapons and military assistance account for fully a third of all Israeli industrial exports. In addition, sales abroad lower Israel's own per unit costs, an especially important consideration for a country with a limited domestic market.

More important, arms sales enhance Israel's diplomatic reach. As an outlier Israel must offer something of value to countries otherwise preferring not to deal openly with the Jewish state. Arms sales and military assistance fulfill this need. In the 1950s and 1960s, a time of acute isolation for Israel, arms sales allowed Israel to breach the wall created by the Arab bloc and to

reach out. This was especially true in Africa, where some 27 countries received military assistance from Israel in the 1960s, including the training of conventional armies and paramilitary forces.¹⁵ Israel also began providing arms and military assistance to countries in Asia, Latin America and even Europe. By the 1980s, arms sales accelerated, with around 50 countries purchasing arms from Israel, a number believed to be maintained in present times¹⁶ and to include countries openly hostile to the Jewish state.

For instance, in order to keep the Iran–Iraq War going and thus contain two adversaries simultaneously, Israel reportedly transferred arms to Iran in the 1980s, including spare parts for weaponry produced in the United States. Israel also allegedly sold arms at various times to Arab states, including Egypt, the UAE and Morocco, thereby enhancing ties with key regional actors.¹⁷ Moreover, arms sales have enabled Israel to help the Jewish Diaspora, as when military assistance to Ethiopia played a key role in convincing its leader, Haile Mariam Mengistu, to allow portions of Ethiopia’s Jewish community to leave for Israel.¹⁸

Given the secrecy surrounding Israeli arms sales, determining the precise impact of military assistance in support of Israeli diplomacy is difficult. That said, it is clear Israeli military assistance has not been an unqualified success, and in no case appears to have resulted in long-term Israeli influence. Success, where it has occurred, has all too often proved short-lived, as the example of Africa after the 1973 War demonstrates. Moreover, Israel has paid a price in worldwide public opinion for arms sales to unsavory regimes. Israeli military sales to South Africa (while it was under apartheid), Guatemala (when in the midst of a brutal civil war) and to Mengistu’s Ethiopia (an especially vicious leader) hardly embellished Israel’s international reputation. More recently, alleged Israeli arms sales to South Sudan and Myanmar, both ruled by brutal governments, continue to paint Israel as a country willing to sell weapons to all buyers, without consideration of human rights.

Despite these problems, it would be foolhardy to deny the diplomatic gains attributable to arms sales. Access to many countries, while not providing many visible benefits, may well support Israeli diplomatic initiatives in ways unseen. To be sure, military assistance is not a substitute for skillful diplomacy, but it opens doors for such diplomacy to be practiced. For a country in Israel’s situation, this is no small achievement.

Assessing Israel’s record

Contemporary Israel’s diplomacy disappoints in several senses. Despite the many threats to the country’s security, no treaty binds any great power to its defense. Israel continues to be one of the most censured countries in the world. It remains isolated in the Middle East where most countries still refuse to grant recognition. Although Egypt and Jordan signed treaties with Israel, in each case the peace is “cold,” tourism is limited and popular hatred of Israelis widely manifest. In Europe, both the extreme right and left have little in common other than their desire to see Israel destroyed. Support for Israel remains strong in America, but there are fears that over time only Orthodox Jews, conservative Republicans and Evangelical Christians will continue to back the Jewish state. Whether this support will suffice to sustain the special relationship with the United States needs to be a central concern for Jerusalem.

Israeli diplomacy has also missed opportunities that might have brought a peace settlement with the Palestinians, thus normalizing its existence in the region and within the international community. It is impossible to know how history might have evolved had different decisions

been made, other paths chosen. Nevertheless, at several junctures Israeli diplomacy might reasonably have taken an alternative and more beneficial direction.

Anwar Sadat made several overtures to Israel before finally going to war in 1973, and one is entitled to wonder whether the October War might not have been avoided had Israel been less confident of its ability to deter an Egyptian attack and more forthcoming in responding to those feelers. The 2002 Saudi peace initiative recognized Israel's right to exist, albeit with stringent conditions. Instead of welcoming the plan and negotiating with the Saudis (and others) about these conditions, Israel chose largely to ignore it, possibly missing yet another opportunity for a broader Mideast peace.

Similarly, Israel's insistence that the Palestinians recognize it as a Jewish state, while understandable, may have foreclosed an opportunity to reach a deal with Mahmoud Abbas, the flawed Palestinian leader who nonetheless may be the most reasonable negotiating partner Israelis will have for quite some time. Persistent settlement activity, including settlements established beyond the established blocs, has poisoned relations with the Palestinians, Israel's Middle Eastern neighbors and the world at large. To be sure, much of the blame for the failure to reach a peace deal lies with the Palestinian leadership's support of incitement and terrorism. Nonetheless, it is difficult to ignore the possibility that Israeli diplomacy might have made inroads into achieving peace and acceptance but for continued and expanding occupation.

Nevertheless, despite an unpopular global image and some missed opportunities, Israeli diplomacy on the whole has proven remarkably successful. The first indication of its success is what distinguishes it from its ancient ancestors: namely, modern Israel has not only survived but also thrived.

Israel today maintains diplomatic relations with over 160 countries – a nearly two-fold increase over the past 30 years. Countries throughout the world seek Israeli expertise in fighting terrorism, developing advanced agricultural techniques and advances in information technology. Israel has dramatically improved its relations with China – arguably the most important country in the twenty-first century – and Russia, whose renewed involvement in the Middle East is of prime Israeli concern. Unprecedented for an Indian leader, in 2017, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to Israel, where he appeared to get along famously with Netanyahu (while pointedly refraining from visiting the Palestinian Authority), who paid a reciprocal state visit in January 2018. The dual challenge posed by ISIS and Iran have moved Arab states led by Saudi Arabia closer to Israel, even if they are reluctant to admit so openly.

There are indeed issues with the United States. Yet comparable difficulties failed in the past to undermine the relationship. With terrorism a growing threat, ballistic missile defense (an Israeli specialty) an increasing concern and Israel the only liberal democracy in a key region, it is difficult to see any imminent unraveling of the Israeli–American bond.

Altogether, Israel is more secure and accepted today than ever in its history. It is certainly impervious to anti-Israel resolutions at the UN and to calls for the country's demise by the chattering classes of the left and right.¹⁹ This achievement is owed in no small measure to Israeli diplomacy. For all its faults, pragmatism has taken a small, beleaguered state and made it into a respected (and feared) regional power the likes of which the ancient Israelite kingdoms never came close to achieving.²⁰

Ancient Israel

It is striking how so many core features of contemporary Israel's security diplomacy are identifiable in the ancient Near East during the First and Second Jewish Commonwealths. Existential threats also characterized the plight then of the biblical and post-biblical Israelite kingdoms – except that those bore bitter fruit.

Independent Jewish polities were terminated by the Assyrians in 722 BCE, by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and by the Romans in 70 CE, who delivered the final *coup de grace* in 135 CE. While there are many lessons from these episodes, perhaps none is as important as the recognition that states can perish and that *Jewish* states are especially vulnerable.

Like today's Israel, biblical Israel and its sister kingdom, Judah, also required great power support to make their way in a rough neighborhood. Facing threats both from the northern kingdom of Israel and from Syria, Judah turned to Assyria for help by opting to appease the mighty empire. This move preserved Judah's existence while Israel was destroyed and its ten tribes scattered into oblivion. Following Israel's demise and trusting in divine protection, Judah foolishly rejected the prophet Isaiah's counsel to continue its policy of appeasement and instead turned against Assyria, trusting Egypt would come to its assistance. That Egypt, the "broken reed," did not provide the required support resulted in the near-destruction of Judah, which survived only as a vassal to Assyria.²¹

Over time, the Assyrian empire weakened, with two new hegemonies – Egypt and Babylonia – taking its place. Judah's leaders were able to prolong its precarious existence by playing a skillful game of balancing, hedging and appeasing these empires. However, this strategy ended when King Zedekiah, believing Egypt would come to his aid and rejecting the passionate pleadings of the prophet Jeremiah to continue its policy of appeasement, opted to confront Babylonia. This proved fatal, for Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah, obliterated the kingdom and sent many of its inhabitants into exile.²²

The Babylonians were conquered in turn by the Persians who, under the enlightened leadership of King Cyrus, allowed Jewish exiles to return to their homeland and rebuild their Temple some 70 years later. The returnees reestablished a Jewish polity; but within just a few centuries, it too came to a tragic end. Jews in what was now called Judea turned on each other in a bitter civil war, during which one faction asked for the assistance of the powerful Roman Empire in defeating its rival. The price paid for Roman intervention was the end of Judea's independence. It would be almost two millennia before a Jewish polity reappeared on world maps.²³

Another parallel between ancient and contemporary Israel is the distinction of being Jewish. One consequence was that the Israelite kingdoms of biblical times were also concerned with Jews living outside of their borders. Even after Jewish exiles in Babylonia were allowed to return to Judah, a large Diaspora community remained while others were established in Egypt. Ties between Jerusalem and these diasporas remained close until the very end of Jewish independence in 135 CE.²⁴

The similarities go further. In the past, as today, the distinction of being the world's only Jewish state presented two further challenges to Israel's diplomacy. One was the need to circumvent the country's outlier status (which in the ancient world found expression in being a monotheistic entity struggling to maintain its identity in a sea of pagan empires). The other challenge was that of anti-Semitism, a phenomenon prominent in the biblical Book of Esther, which relates a plot to exterminate the Jews of the Persian empire in the third century BCE; and again evident two centuries later, when Greeks and Syrians accused Jews of following religious practices that fostered perversion and social unrest.²⁵

From our current perspective, the record of ancient Israel's diplomacy is instructive. The demise of the ancient kingdoms reveals not only the plight of the weak, but also the failure of leaders to make decisions necessary for survival. They repeatedly miscalculated, rising up against powerful foes when accommodation was called for. This is not to say the diplomacy practiced by ancient Israeli polities was a total failure. Their very survival for centuries in a brutal environment where the strong routinely swallowed up the weak attests to considerable skill in balancing between competing foes. Most important, Diaspora diplomacy, broadly conceived, kept alive the notion of restored Jewish sovereignty in the face of repeated setbacks, ultimately paving the way for the establishment of today's modern Israel.

Future challenges

Present-day Israel confronts a world no less dangerous or hostile than 2,000 years ago. The challenge before it is to pursue a security diplomacy reflecting those same characteristics shared in common with its ancient predecessors, but to do so in a way that avoids their tragic fate. To accomplish this, Israeli statecraft must achieve five major breakthroughs in coming years. These breakthroughs will require: (1) acting quickly, (2) confronting domestic groups and (3) taking risks.

First, Israel must employ diplomacy to mitigate if not eliminate threats to its existence. The most pressing of these threats stems from Iran, and will become especially acute at the end of the next decade, once Teheran is again free to produce material for nuclear weapons without constraint. As the experience of the ancient kingdoms all too tragically shows, Israel must never be in a position where its survival depends on the decisions of others.

Preventing Iran from developing nuclear arms must therefore remain a cornerstone of Israeli diplomacy. Rather than await the expiry of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreed to by Iran in July 2015 – or for the deal to collapse – Israeli diplomacy has to prepare for when that day arrives. Here, again, the key relationship is with the United States.

Before the JCPOA was concluded, significant gaps emerged in the respective positions of the United States and of Israel as to what constituted a trigger for armed attack. Washington argued Iran would have to be seen to be developing nuclear weapons, while Jerusalem pressed for military action as soon as the *capability* to produce nuclear weapons became evident. Israel's decision not to attack Iran settled this dispute in favor of the American position, though not without considerable rancor between the countries.

This kind of dispute must not be allowed to resurface when the JCPOA's major provisions elapse or it is prematurely terminated. Israeli officials need to meet with their American counterparts and come to an agreement as to the "red lines" of Iranian behavior that would precipitate a restoration of economic sanctions or an armed attack. If Washington and Jerusalem disagree, then Israel has to explain to the United States what it is prepared to do unilaterally in reaction to Iranian behavior. These discussions need to be held while JCPOA's constraints on Iranian behavior are still in effect and not in the fevered atmosphere likely to follow their removal. Moreover, Israeli diplomacy should support efforts to produce a follow-on agreement to be reached before the JCPOA's key provisions expire. Israel has a compelling interest that such an agreement be concluded, and with provisions preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. While Israel may not be able to participate directly in such discussions, this represents an ideal opening for the "backdoor" diplomacy at which it excels.

The second key challenge for Israeli security diplomacy is maintaining close ties with

Diaspora Jews – of all shades of belief – and keeping alive Israel’s image as the “state of the Jewish people.” Although Israel may no longer need the Diaspora’s financial support, certainly not to the extent it once did, Jewish political influence (particularly in the United States) remains a strong incentive for maintaining a cordial relationship. The growing numbers and influence of the ultra-Orthodox in Israel threaten these ties.

Given the realities of coalition politics in Israel in which the ultra-Orthodox parties wield disproportionate power, it is likely that Israel will continue to adopt policies that disparage and delegitimize the paths chosen by the overwhelming majority of Jews living outside of Israel. With the growing alienation of many Jews in the Diaspora, especially the non-Orthodox, these policies will drive them even further from identifying with Israel. Israeli diplomats of the Diaspora Ministry and the Jewish Agency must engage in ongoing dialogues with Jewish communities abroad, letting them know of their efforts to contain the influence of the ultra-Orthodox and reassure them that there will be limits to ultra-Orthodox control. Not an easy task, but a necessary one if Israel is to continue to derive critical benefits from its Jewish brethren abroad.

A third challenge for Israeli security diplomacy – more of an opportunity – is to cultivate and enlarge ties with key Sunni Arab countries. Shared fear of Iran’s aggressive actions in the Middle East alarm Sunni leaders and therefore creates a strong foundation for an Israeli–Sunni alignment. That Israel has much to offer the Sunni world by providing assistance in water technology and energy – and particularly in coping with security threats – adds to its appeal. The key sticking point is that support for the Palestinian cause remains high among the Sunni states. Were progress made on the Palestinian issue, Israel might finally realize its dream of acceptance as a legitimate state actor in the Middle East.

The fourth challenge facing Israeli security diplomacy is to maintain the alliance with the United States or, failing that, to come up with an alternative. The American–Israeli relationship is strong, but, as Israel’s previous ties with Russia, Britain and France demonstrate, alliances can be short-lived.

Washington and Jerusalem continue to differ over core issues such as Israel’s West Bank settlement policy and Iran. More difficult to understand is why Israel takes actions gratuitously angering Washington for no clear or readily apparent benefit. At times, Israel appears to fail to recognize cooperation is a two-way street, such as refusing American requests to join in the UN condemnation of Russia’s 2014 invasion of Crimea. Actions such as Netanyahu’s 2015 address to Congress to lobby against the Iran arms deal contrary to the wishes of then-President Obama accomplished nothing and merely aggravated American–Israeli relations.

Yet even if Israel does studiously avoid needlessly antagonizing the United States, it must still confront the possibility of the relationship weakening or even unraveling. Lessons from the demise of the Israelite kingdoms resonate strongly here; namely, do not allow yourself to become hostage to a single ally who might not be there when most needed. That said, no other country possesses the capacity – let alone the will – to provide Israel with levels of military and political support comparable to the United States.²⁶

Israeli diplomacy will undoubtedly continue to reach out to China, India and even Russia, but it must do so fully recognizing that none of these countries can remotely replace America. The task for Israeli diplomacy then is to keep the American relationship as strong as it can for as long as possible while preparing for the day it might conceivably end. This requires hard thinking about how Israel might be reasonably secure and survive without a great power patron. In this, modern Israel has an advantage over its ancient forebears. Contemporary Israel possesses a

vibrant economy, a strong military and the insurance policy provided by its nuclear deterrent. Confronting a hostile world without a powerful ally is hardly the preferred scenario for Israel, although there is some comfort, diplomatically, knowing that if necessary Israel can go it alone.

Achieving a resolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is the final challenge for Israeli security diplomacy – one that has eluded diplomats since Israel’s creation. Amid the pessimism, however, there are encouraging changes that over time could foster a successful diplomatic approach. If Israel can establish understandings with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States this might provide the basis for a regional and even comprehensive settlement of the Palestinian dispute in ways previously deemed impossible. Israel’s growing economic and military strength likewise might enable concessions and compromises previously rejected as too risky.

Growing fatigue with the conflict both within Israel and in parts of the Arab world may open up possibilities for creative diplomacy that did not and could not exist so long as ideological or theological fervor prevailed. The potential partition of Syria and perhaps Iraq into smaller states as a result of their civil wars would not only remove two implacable Israeli foes but would also create new countries with Sunni majorities conceivably amenable to relations with Israel, further weakening the anti-Israeli coalition and perhaps opening up new opportunities for peace.

The Middle East of the second decade of the twenty-first century is a very different place than it has ever been. Arguing that peace with the Palestinians cannot be achieved because it failed in the past makes little sense. Creative Israeli security diplomacy, using regular and “backdoor” approaches, building on existing relationships and developing new ones might just bring about the lasting peace that would finally provide Israel with the security it has sought for so long.

Conclusion

Modern Israel has been more fortunate than its ancient predecessors. Despite diplomatic mistakes and opportunities missed, thus far no blunder has been fatal. On the contrary, through deft security-based diplomacy, the Israel of today has flourished, becoming a major regional power recognized by most of the world. Whether its good fortune continues is dependent on how it manages its relationship with the United States, how it copes with the potential unraveling of that relationship, and how it deals with the existential threat posed by a nuclear-armed Iran. If it can handle these challenges successfully, contemporary Israel will be able to avoid the fate of its ancient predecessors, and perhaps even end the threatened annihilation dogging its existence for so many years.

Notes

- 1 For example, Iran’s Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei tweeted, “This Barbaric and Infanticidal Regime of #Israel Which Spares No Crime Has No Cure But to Be Annihilated.” www.slate.com/blogsthe_slate/2014/1109/iran_s_khamenei_israel-must_be_annihilated.html.
- 2 Joshua Muravchik, *Making David Into Goliath: How the World Turned Against Israel*. New York: Encounter Books, 2014, pp. 73–74.
- 3 For a comprehensive treatment of the BDS movement by one of its founders, see Omar Barghouti, *BDS: The Global Struggle for Palestinian Rights*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011. For a more critical view, see: Matthew S. Cohen and Chuck D. Freilich, “War by Other Means: The Delegitimation Campaign Against Israel,” *Israel Affairs* 24 (2018): 1–25.
- 4 For an excellent overview of how security threats have affected Israel’s diplomacy that has stood the test of time, see Aaron S. Klieman, *Israel and the World After 40 Years*. New York: Pergamon-Brassey, 1990, esp. pp. 24, 46, 108, 121.
- 5 See also Chapter 12.
- 6 For an examination of the shortcomings of Israeli public diplomacy, see Eytan Gilboa, “Public Diplomacy: The Missing

- Component in Israel's Foreign Policy," *Israel Affairs* 12 (2006): 715–747.
- 7 See also Chapter 16 in this book, below.
 - 8 See also Chapter 17 in this book, below.
 - 9 Peter Beinart, *The Crisis of Zionism*. New York: Times Books, 2012, pp. 168–172.
 - 10 Quoted in Shlomo Avineri, "Ideology and Israel's Foreign Policy," *The Jerusalem Quarterly* 37 (1986): 11.
 - 11 Sasson Sofer, "Towards Distant Frontiers: The Course of Israeli Diplomacy," *Israel Affairs* 10 (2004): 9.
 - 12 The remainder either affiliate with smaller groups or to do not identify themselves as Jews et al., "A Portrait of Jewish Americans," *Pew Religious Center*, October 1, 2013. www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/jewish-american-beliefs-attitudes-culture-survey/
 - 13 Aharon Klieman, *Statecraft in the Dark: Israel's Practice of Quiet Diplomacy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988, p. 50.
 - 14 Yossi Alpher, *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle East Allies*. New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2015. Alpher writes of the "Trident" alliance between Israel, Turkey and Iran in which Turkey and Iran shared intelligence with Israel. Although Israel did not gain much valuable intelligence, it did succeed in establishing ties (for a time) with key Middle Eastern states. No small accomplishment.
 - 15 Abel Jacob, "Israel's Military Aid to Africa, 1960–1966," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 9 (1971): 165–166.
 - 16 Israel does not publicly reveal its list of clients, so estimates of recipients are based on various published reports.
 - 17 Aluf Benn, "Israel Is Selling Military Wares to Middle East Countries, Britain Says," *Ha'aretz*, June 11, 2013. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-1.528993?=&ts=1515085688057
 - 18 Yitzhak Mualem, "Israel's Foreign Policy: Military-Economic Aid and Assisting Jewish Communities in Distress – Can the Two Coexist?," *Israel Affairs* 18 (2012): 205.
 - 19 One example is provided by the rise in tourism, including medical tourism, from states with which Israel has no formal ties.
 - 20 For a full-throated argument that Israel is doing just fine in the world, see Netanyahu's 2016 speech to the United Nations. <http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Benjamin-Netanyahu/READ-Full-text-of-Netanyahus-speech-to-UN-General-Assembly-468500>.
 - 21 Isaiah, 36:6.
 - 22 Jeremiah 34, 35.
 - 23 On the lessons of ancient diplomacy, see Steven R. David, "Existential Threats to Israel: Learning From the Ancient Past," *Israel Affairs* 18 (2012): 503–525.
 - 24 M. Stern, "The Period of the Second Temple," in: Haim Ben-Sasson (ed.) *A History of the Jewish People*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976, p. 180.
 - 25 Lee I. Levine, "The Age of Hellenism," in: *Ancient Israel: From Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*. New York: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2011, pp. 255–256.
 - 26 This is a key point made by Charles Freilich. See, "Can Israel Survive Without America," *Survival* 59 (2017): esp. 142–146.

15

Negotiating Israeli security

Aharon Klieman

Authoritative military histories abundantly document efforts by Israel to uphold its national security in keeping with its inherent right of collective or “individual self-defense” under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter. Far less analyzed and certainly less respected are (a) the country’s conceptual approach to the alternative of diplomatic bargaining and (b) its practical efforts at preserving as well as promoting marginally higher levels of security through negotiation. This chapter aims to fill those lacunae by focusing on the circumstances influencing Israeli efforts to attain national security through statecraft and the art of negotiation. After surveying the chronicle and character of Israeli–Palestinian diplomatic contacts, especially, and the reasons for their failure, the chapter concludes with a brief analysis of two possible alternative formats that might enhance Israel’s security.

Negotiating dilemmas

When electing to attempt to employ negotiation as a method of enhancing their security, all states need to address four primary questions. Whether to negotiate? When to negotiate? How to negotiate? With whom to negotiate? Each of these interlinked queries poses dilemmas that are especially pertinent to the case of Israel, and none of them is amenable to easy resolution. Considerable influence on the content of the answers undoubtedly will be exerted by the identity, predispositions and worldviews of the individuals, soldiers as well as civilians, who bear ultimately responsibility for whatever security decisions are taken. Moreover, when formulating their negotiating strategies, they will necessarily assess the public’s mood, morale and perceived preferences for either belligerency or diplomacy – preferences that are liable to be volatile. At the same time, they will also have to correlate their conclusions with intelligence readings of the intentions of prospective Arab and Palestinian negotiating partners. Do they communicate a genuine willingness to engage Israel in the give-and-take of hard bargaining premised upon mutual compromise?

Unilateralism as an option

Against that backdrop of multiple imponderables, *whether to negotiate* must surely be considered the most fundamental of the four questions confronting Israel, and also that which its

leaders must address before any other. Can diplomatic prowess offer a more appropriate, economical and effective path to the attainment of national security than military power? Alternatively, in the absence of a negotiating partner, might it not make sense to seek to alleviate tensions by taking non-violent *unilateral* action, in the form of territorial withdrawals or other concessions?

Israeli responses to those queries have for many years been sharply divided, with official and public opinion tending to oscillate at any given moment between optimism and skepticism. Optimists insist that all conflicts must end; that objectively there exists a solution even for the Arab–Israeli–Palestinian dispute; that with persistence, earnest intent and adept statecraft the warring sides will ultimately arrive at a negotiated and workable end-of-conflict – as indeed is proven by the peace treaties concluded with Egypt in 1979 and with Jordan in 1994.

Israeli skeptics, recalling the failure of protracted negotiations with both Lebanon (in 1983) and with the Palestinian Authority (most noticeably at the Camp David Summit of 2000), tend to be considerably more pessimistic. On one occasion, in 2005, the conviction that negotiation is futile resulted in a decision unilaterally to remove Israel’s military and civilian presence from the Gaza Strip. Far more frequently, it has led to the adoption of decidedly aggressive tones. Convinced that “the only thing the Arabs understand is force,” Israeli skeptics emphatically, even if apologetically, answer in the affirmative to a query that has lost none of its relevance since first formulated in Biblical times: “*halanetzach tochal cherev*” (*Samuel II*, 2: 26) – Are we fated to live constantly by the sword?

Peace and security versus security and peace

The timing for negotiation, the second of the four quandaries noted above, raises allied issues. Are peaceful, regularized relations with former adversaries the precondition as well as the best guarantee for ultimate security or, conversely, is security – otherwise referred to as negotiating from strength – in itself the *sine qua non* for then engaging adversaries and for achieving peace? Here, too, Israelis have failed to achieve a domestic political consensus. Indeed, at the ideational level, the closest thing to a great national debate over ending the Arab–Israeli conflict pits the *Peace and Security Association* (emphasis mine), founded in 1988 and representing hundreds of veteran security experts, against a less formally organized and less articulated *Security and Peace* camp closely aligned with the thinking and platform of the reigning *Likud* coalition.

As its name might suggest, and as its statement of purposes makes explicit, the *Peace and Security Association* works to promote “a sustainable political solution” as a “critical component of Israel’s national security and social resilience.”¹ The opposite stream of thought, with roots in Jabotinsky’s “iron wall” thesis,² posits security as a precondition for the attainment of peace, insisting that only uncompromising steadfastness on Israel’s part will compel Arab intransigence to yield to realism and thereby promote mutual accommodation and security.

Standing on ceremony

Compared to “whether to negotiate” and “when to negotiate,” *How to Negotiate?* might appear at first sight to touch upon merely procedural issues that should be amenable to compromise between the parties. However, and as the many would-be facilitators of Middle Eastern diplomatic contacts can unhappily confirm, nothing could be further from reality. To their great frustration, peace brokers find themselves spending a disproportionate amount of time and effort

in either pressuring or cajoling the antagonists into finally and simply consenting to meet. Such indeed has always been the case. Ever since the 1930s, Arab–Jewish negotiating deadlock has resulted quite as much – if not more – from differences over process as from differences over substance. A survey of the record of contacts between the sides reveals that the configuration or architecture of negotiation has invariably been not only the first barrier to successful diplomacy, but arguably also the most contentious.

Blame for that situation is spread fairly even. Indeed, perhaps the only characteristic common to all the Israeli, Arab and Palestinian diplomats who have come anywhere near a negotiating table is their obsession with technicalities. They have invested infinitely far more time and creative energies in *pre*-negotiation than in exchanges on matters of substance. Typically, they haggle over an almost endless list of seeming trivialities: selection of a venue (in a neutral country/in or outside the Middle East); will the talks – if they ever materialize – be indirect (“brokered”) or direct, overt or discreet; with or without preconditions? What is to be the level of representation: official or unofficial, civilian or military personnel, lower-ranking bureaucrats or empowered leaders at the top who personally engage in summit diplomacy?

There can be little doubt that Arabs and Israelis alike regard each such procedural question as laden with both symbolic and political importance. Hence, they often manipulate the initial proceedings in order to test the other side’s intentions, degree of flexibility or resolve. Talking endlessly about talking has thus gained an importance of its own. This ploy has also been used tactically, as a pretext for purposely stalling and foot-dragging or as a convenient way of avoiding more contentious issues and the painful compromises required for the sake of agreement. Through the medium of pre-talks, both sides have also sought to gain leverage and quite plausibly to extract early concessions even before real negotiations begin.

Extensive talks about talks are rarely productive. Usually, they are the cause of repeated delays in keeping to fine-tuned but politically unrealistic timeframes, timetables and timelines. They also provide an unwanted and occasionally deliberate distraction, in the sense that arguing over procedures necessarily comes at the expense of serious substantive negotiation, especially when an impasse at so preliminary a stage prevents any further progress. Even when the two sides do agree eventually to meet, the atmosphere is laden with mutual charges of bad faith, fermented long before they have sat down at the table.

One possible way of avoiding those difficulties is to substitute informal negotiation for its conventional, ceremonial forms. Over the years, indeed, Israeli leaders have become well versed in the art of indirect, unofficial and even secret diplomacy, conducted in the interstices between war and peace. Characteristically, these contacts altogether bypass traditional diplomacy’s conventions and norms. Instead, they make use of such avenues as discreet back channeling; warnings and intentions signaled through the media; private messages passed through the “good offices” of third-party intermediaries. From time to time, these mechanisms have definitely proven useful in avoiding misunderstandings and armed clashes over Arab arms buildups and troop deployments, cross-border incursions and other provocations inimical to Israeli security. They have also provided Israel’s leaders with opportunities for the communication of their “red lines” on security.³ Nevertheless, in the final analysis “back-stairs” diplomacy of this sort has its limits. At best, it can only enable the sides to avoid imminent clashes. It does not constitute a means for bringing them close enough to broker an agreement over future long-term cooperation. Ultimately, the latter requires direct meetings and exchanges, which brings us to the fourth and final quandary.

Geometries of negotiation

With whom to negotiate?, the fourth and final question, impinges on each of the previous three. What distinguishes it from the others is that in this case especially no one side can provide the answer alone. Parties can only negotiate – whether about procedure or substance – when engaging with others who are willing to enter into the exchange. Conversely, each of the parties can prevent the negotiating enterprise from seeing the light of day simply by refusing to accept the other side’s proposals as to the roster of participants.

From a broad historical perspective, the failure to agree about the composition of the negotiating forum is unquestionably a cardinal cause for the paucity of Arab–Israeli negotiating successes. Israel’s preference, a preference adhered to with unwavering consistency by all Israeli governments over the past 70 years, is for a *bilateral* format. From Jerusalem’s viewpoint, direct two-party talks between representatives of Israel and those of whichever Arab state or entity is ready to meet with them is the only appropriate and solely acceptable format for seriously negotiating security issues as well as all other peace agenda items. Mediation, involving the participation of outside parties, is by comparison a poor second choice and international conferences involving multiple participants – Arab and non-Arab – very decidedly a distasteful third, to be accepted only in the very last resort. In the words of Prime Minister Netanyahu:

There is *one way* to advance peace – *direct* negotiations without preconditions between the sides. This is the true way and I think that anyone who tries to deviate from it will not advance successful negotiations.

(emphases added)⁴

By contrast, Arabs and Palestinians traditionally promote a multilateral (*e.g.*, regional or international) framework, a format diametrically and deliberately opposed to Israel’s preference for bilateral talks. Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmud Abbas has reiterated that view on several occasions, leaving no doubt as to its status as a basic tenet of his entire negotiating strategy. Thus, after announcing, on February 20, 2018, “our absolute readiness to reach a historic peace agreement [with Israel],” he immediately reiterated that:

to solve the Palestine question, it is *essential* to establish a *multilateral* mechanism emanating from an *international* conference and in line with *international* law and the relevant resolutions.

(emphases added)⁵

The difficulties likely to be encountered in any attempt to bridge these contrasting preferences became sharply apparent as early as the 1939 Round Table on Palestine, or London Conference, a multilateral forum to which the hosts, the British Government, invited not just Palestinian and Jewish delegations but also representatives from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Yemen. The Jewish delegates hoped to bypass this discouraging framework, which gave the Arab viewpoint an automatic minority, by holding secret and direct parallel meetings with their Palestinian counterparts. All such ploys failed, however. The Palestinians refused to sit at the same table or even in the same room with Jewish representatives. Instead, they insisted on sticking with the multilateral framework, which provided a cloak for the encouragement and adoption of positions that were uncompromisingly intransigent. No wonder, then, that this first experiment in conflict

avoidance through negotiation and dialogue ended badly, frustrating British attempts to achieve, through mediation, a settlement designed to avoid the spilling of blood – including their own.

Between Rhodes and Lausanne

The events of the tumultuous decade that followed the failure of the London Conference did nothing to lessen the gulf between the preferred negotiation scenarios of the two sides. How much they still differed became clear in 1948–1949, when the parties to the Israeli–Arab conflict (as it had now become) took the first tentative steps towards realigning their relationships after the close of the War of Independence. Many observers hoped that these diplomatic efforts would initiate a shift from belligerency to armistice and thence to conciliation. Instead, they bequeathed to later generations of Middle East peacemakers the two basic contrasting prototypes of bilateral versus multilateral negotiation.⁶

In just over six months, between January 6 and July 20, 1949, four agreements were negotiated separately on the Greek island of Rhodes in the presence of UN Acting Mediator Ralph Bunche. Armistice documents were signed by Israel and Egypt (February 24), Israel and Lebanon (March 23), Israel and Trans-Jordan (April 3) and Israel and Syria (July 20). These interim agreements addressed Israel's immediate security considerations, such as demarcating armistice lines and demilitarized zones pending ultimate settlement of the dispute. Also covered in the documents were the terms of reference for the Mixed Armistice Commissions (MACs) formed under the auspices of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) and empowered to investigate complaints by all parties and to make regular reports to the UN Security Council.

At the time, it was generally anticipated that the successful Rhodes agreements would be superseded in fairly short order by permanent peace treaties, instruments definitively ending hostilities between the parties. Under the auspices of a UN Palestine Conciliation Commission, an international peace conference was indeed convened in Lausanne, Switzerland, on April 27, 1949, with a mandate to reach a comprehensive “final settlement of all questions outstanding between” Arabs and Jews in Palestine.

Except this gathering proved to be a conference in name only. Consistent with the 1939 precedent, the Egyptian, Lebanese and Palestinian refugee committees and Syrian conferees insisted on acting *en bloc*. The Israelis, appealing to the Rhodes formula, wanted to negotiate with each delegation individually. Unable to reconcile these differences, the members of the UN's Conciliation Commission were compelled to shuttle back and forth between the Israelis and Arabs, who never sat together face-to-face in a general session but positioned themselves in different rooms. These conditions were far from conducive to the solution of the refugee and territorial issues arising from the recent war, let alone the other core territorial issues of security and freedom from attack, recognized borders and Jerusalem. On September 12, after less than six months of barren maneuvering, the forum adjourned, to the accompaniment of an exchange of charges of bad faith. Lausanne's only accomplishment was to confirm each side in its assessment of the pluses and minuses of conference diplomacy versus face-to-face discussions.

Since neither Israelis nor their potential Arab interlocutors have ever deviated from the opposing positions thus staked out in both 1939 and 1949, the rationales behind their respective preferences – bilateral and multilateral – merit clarification.

Why Palestinians favor Lausanne

The pro-internationalization Palestinian position is straightforward. International conference diplomacy in a collective setting is believed to offer their side distinct bargaining advantages.

First, and most obvious, it places Israel at a numerical disadvantage and thereby for Israel's stronger bargaining and power position backed by its US patron. The solitary presence of a single Israeli delegation across from numerous Arab and Muslim countries together with others sympathetic to the Palestinian cause is of inestimable political, tactical and psychological importance. Badly outnumbered and thrust on the defensive, Israel can be subjected to multiple pressures for greater flexibility, and insistence that Jerusalem be more forthcoming in making concessions. At the same time, multilateralism facilitates Arab solidarity in backing extreme positions and demands. It also allows the Palestinians to "outsource" their dispute with Israel, attracting to the negotiating table not only numerous Arab and Muslim countries but also other parties sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

This thinking accounts for Arab and Palestinian support for the series of multilateral initiatives that have surfaced over the years; e.g., in 1973 (Geneva), 2001 (Madrid) and 2007 (Annapolis). It also explains their condemnation of Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's direct approach to Israel in 1977 as a betrayal of Arab solidarity and the Palestinians' renewed efforts at once again internationalizing the dispute.

Why Israelis favor Rhodes

For precisely opposite and compelling reasons, opposition to peace conferencing and advocacy in favor of the bilateral model endures as a staple tenet in Israel's core negotiating posture. Bilateralism counters asymmetry with parity, leveling the sides on a one-to-one basis.

In historical terms, there is some justice in the dispute terminating where it began: between the two resident communities in Palestine proper. Besides which, no one can want ... or need ... peace and coexistence more than the two directly concerned parties. In addition, experience teaches that peace conferences are unwieldy, whereas direct dialogue, motivated by pragmatism, alone yields breakthroughs. As Israel's former defense minister Moshe Ya'alon, speaking with characteristic bluntness, once exclaimed: "I've had enough of conferences, enough of ceremonies, enough of documents phrased by lawyers. At the end of the day it's between us and them."⁷

Ample proof exists for the benefits of unbrokered two-party negotiation. Suffice to list the Israeli-Egyptian "Kilometer 101" military talks that cemented the cease-fire between the sides in 1973. The Israel-Egypt Separation of Forces Agreement (1974) and Sinai II Interim Agreement (1975). The Israel-Syria Agreement on Disengagement (1974). The Begin-Sadat Initiative (1977) and Camp David (1978). The Oslo Accords (1993, 1995) and the "Treaty of Peace Between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan" (1994).

The principal reason for these successes, however partial, is that the bilateral format limited to issues of direct concern to the two parties makes for discrete, businesslike progress, while outside interference often leads to intransigence. One supplementary argument, with reference to international intermediaries, is that all too often their intercession is non-essential, even worse, counterproductive, in that it distracts the two main antagonists. Rather than using their best efforts to reason with and persuade each other, in seeking comparative advantage they compete instead in recruiting the presumably impartial third-party mediator to their side.⁸

In sum: several lessons can be derived from comparing these two foundational negotiating strategies over time. First, the procedural question remains unresolved. Second, Israeli security needs are too often hostage to repeated procedural deadlocks. Third, such deadlocks result from Israel's dedicated efforts at deflecting multilateral initiatives (the post-2001 Middle East Quartet and "performance-based and goal-driven" 2002 Roadmap for Peace in the Middle East, the 2016 French Initiative), which are invariably countered and offset by Palestinian-led Arab vetoes of a direct negotiation track with Israel.⁹

Breaking the impasse? 1993 and 2007

In recent memory, there have been at least two occasions when world statesmen and even most Israelis believed that the procedural impasse with the Palestinians had been broken and that the groundwork had been laid to enable fruitful negotiations to proceed. The first such milestone can be dated to September 13, 1993, when the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. This was considered a first-order achievement precisely because the Declaration went beyond mutual recognition and established an agreed political process for achieving "a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement and historic reconciliation." Specifically, Article V stipulated permanent [bilateral] status negotiations between, explicitly, "the Government of Israel and the Palestinian people's representatives."¹⁰

The second occasion on which a procedural breakthrough seemed to be at hand was November 27, 2007, the date on which US President George Bush presented a "Joint Understanding" to the large international gathering that he had convened at the US Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. By then, the "Oslo process" had manifestly run out of steam, generating a sense of frustration only exacerbated by the failure of the summit talks between Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat held under President Clinton's patronage at Camp David in 2000. The Annapolis "Joint Understanding" promised a new beginning. Israel and the Palestinians, Bush announced, had agreed on a hybrid procedure. It was to commence with the Annapolis gathering – as wide a multilateral forum as anyone could hope for.¹¹ But it was immediately to be followed, so both Israel and the PLO pledged, by "good-faith bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty, resolving all outstanding issues, including all core issues without exception, as specified in previous agreements."¹²

To this inherent endorsement of Israel's preferred direct and bilateral negotiation model Bush appended an announcement of a procedural innovation – the significance of which does not seem to have received the recognition it deserves, either at the time or subsequently. In the two closing sentences of his Annapolis statement, the President declared:

The United States will *monitor and judge* the fulfillment of the commitment of both sides of the road map. Unless otherwise agreed by the parties, implementation of the future peace treaty will be subject to the implementation of the road map, as *judged* by the United States.
(emphases added)

This was a development of truly momentous import. In one stroke, the US catapulted in status from a mere provider of "good offices" or a go-between, and from a conciliator or facilitator, to referee and ultimate authority. Hereafter, the United States could and would cast itself in the

image of Madeleine Albright's "indispensable nation," interposing itself as central "honest broker" and "balancer" in what in effect turned into three-party negotiations. Based upon the Annapolis "Joint Understanding," the US reserves the right to act as final arbiter in evaluating both Israeli and Palestinian positions, as well as to monitor their conduct and possibly impose bridging proposals of its own. In effect, bilateralism thus transposed into trilateralism, with the United States positioned at the apex of the triangular structure thus created.

Both Israelis and Palestinians have responded to this new geometry with mixed feelings.

While Israel's diplomatic and security strategy continues to preserve a special, perhaps even deferential, role for the US in peacemaking efforts, Jerusalem has sometimes begun to doubt America's credibility and steadfast let alone unqualified support for Israel's interests. Tensions and peacemaking differences persisted throughout most of the Obama era, capped in December 2016 when, in the dying days of the administration, the US departed from its traditional policy by demonstratively electing to abstain in the vote on UN Security Council resolution 2344 demanding an immediate halt to all Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

Abetting this insecurity is the consistent, studied and longstanding opposition from the Eisenhower to Trump Administrations to a legal, binding bilateral US-Israel mutual defense treaty as part of a larger peace package guaranteeing the country's longer-term safety and security. Even so, trilateralism and Washington's pivotal role have been acceptable for Israel on the confident assumption the United States is at heart partial in Israel's favor and, above all, supportive in meeting Israel's security concerns and needs.

Palestinian strategists have taken a different course. For some time, they could justify tripartite negotiation and acceptance of the US as their fallback position so long as they saw a chance of winning over American opinion and, backed by their fellow Arab countries, of pressing the US to lean on Israel for the sake of a prestigious American-mediated peace agreement. Of late, however, they have increasingly come condemn the US as "part of the problem and not the solution."¹³ On that basis, they now seek alternative candidates for the role of "final arbiter," who they trust to be more sympathetic to the Palestinian cause (Russia, China and France have each been proposed). Simultaneously, they have posited the notion of collective mediation, a framework within which US influence could be neutralized by, for instance, the Quartet, the European Union or the UN body's broader sponsorship. In that iteration, the Palestinian stance proposes a variant of the multilateral mechanism, and thus a reversion to the strategy first implemented at the London Conference of 1939, and to which Israelis have been adamantly opposed ever since.

Functionalism and regionalism: the way forward?

This record of attempts to enhance Israel's security by diplomatic means necessarily leaves an unhappy impression. Notwithstanding the considerable and at times impressively inventive efforts invested in all the conventional tools of statecraft – unilateral, bilateral, trilateral and multilateral – the results have been comparatively meager and the Middle East region remains a zone of seemingly insoluble tension. Especially is this so where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned.

Notwithstanding over 75 years of covert and overt diplomatic contacts, some direct, others at especially convened international fora, many more under the auspices of intermediaries of one

type or another – the two sides remain deadlocked. They are seemingly unmoved either by their “mutually hurting stalemate” or by “mutual-enticing opportunities,” and give the impression of preferring the status quo and conflict management to painful concessions. Under those circumstances, the sought-after exquisite moment of negotiating “ripeness”¹⁴ would appear to be as hard to pin down as ever.

However, it would be wrong to conclude on an entirely despondent note. Two unexhausted negotiating constructs do remain that give grounds for guarded optimism: one already attempted, the other still hypothetical. Termed the functional approach and regionalism, they will each be outlined in turn.

The functional approach

A precedent for the possible Israeli–Palestinian application of a functional approach to conflict resolution was set in the Madrid Conference held in the late fall of 1991. The most inventive and also successful feature of this gathering was its three-tiered format: an opening three-day conference followed by four sets of bilateral negotiations (Israel–Jordan, Israel–Palestinians, Israel–Syria, Israel–Lebanon) parallel with a multilateral track of separate working groups devoted to major issues of concern for the future of the entire Middle East.¹⁵ One of these five functional regional workshops was security-related, with experts from countries within as well as outside the region conferring on the general theme of arms control. Other working groups exchanged papers and consulted with experts on water, environment, arms control, refugees and economic development.

Bi-annual Track II meetings of the professional working group on Arms Control and Regional Security thus established took place between May 1992 and December 1994, their purpose being to stimulate confidence- and security-building measures while exploring a number of operational and conceptual issues connected to four key “win–win” projects. Had the Track I bilateral peace negotiations not collapsed, the ACRS group might have gone on as planned to collaborate in setting up a desperately needed Middle East Crisis Prevention Center, a Regional Security Center and an Arms Control data bank plus scheduling a joint naval exercise and conference of regional naval officers.

Regrettably, this one brief “window of opportunity” was allowed to close. Still, the precedent exists for thinking the unthinkable – mutual and assured security – and for reinstating the functional format in the name of prudence, pragmatism and survival. While it may not be a game-changer, functionalism nonetheless does point to the untapped potential that still lies in peaceful partnering.

Regionalism

Left for last as a prospective negotiating route to security because of its growing appeal in certain circles, including in Israel, is a more limited form of multilateralism, known as regionalism. Prominent Israeli strategists, encouraged by perceived favorable regional trends, claim to see the advantages in resolving the Palestinian dimension of the comprehensive Arab–Israeli dispute within a relatively more manageable all Arab or Middle East framework.

While no substitute for direct negotiation, the idea of a regional conference and peace pact in accordance with the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative¹⁶ offers a compromise between Israeli bilateralism and Palestinian internationalism, and arguably a better alternative than protracted

deadlock and further rounds of war. There is also the powerful argument that, objectively, issues like security, militarization, refugees, Jerusalem and normalization do have a direct regional bearing, and can only be confronted and resolved collectively.

As might be expected, however, Palestinians and Israelis each assess the merits and demerits of Middle East diplomacy under a different mix of motives, the former eternally confident their original 1939 strategy of regionalizing the Palestine problem and appealing to Arab unity will ultimately vindicate itself. It also offers one additional side benefit. Given suspicions about Washington's role in any other trilateral or global initiative, the regional framework would effectively finesse the recent yardstick for negotiation: "nothing without the United States and nothing with the United States alone."¹⁷ In times past, the Palestinian side lobbied for multi-party negotiations, whether Middle Eastern or international, as a deliberate procedural maneuver for curbing Israel's influence, whereas now the aim is to circumscribe and neutralize Israel *and* the US.

An Israeli calculus likewise underscores the prospective advantages and benefits of an open regional forum, in that, symbolically, it confers legitimacy, conveys Arab acceptance of Israel as a full-fledged regional player and a willingness to work with Israel. Guarded enthusiasm traces to a school of thought interpreting Middle East currents as conducive to a pragmatic realignment of forces with more moderate and hopefully forthcoming Sunni states sharing a convergent threat perception with Israel against Islamic extremism on the one hand, and an Iranian-led destabilizing Shiite axis on the other hand. The corollary assumes that once recruited as participants, these assembled Arab actors would in fact express their exasperation with the Palestinian leadership's intransigence by insisting upon greater flexibility at the bargaining table.

Should an Israeli government genuinely pursue this option, it would be nothing short of revolutionary, switching the quest for security and peace from the traditional "inside-out" approach of a breakthrough with the Palestinians leading to normalization with the Arab countries to the opposite "outside-in" strategy of relations with the wider Arab world helping to foster peace with the Palestinians.

Intimations of such a sea change slowly percolating and gathering support from within the Prime Minister's Office might have been detected already in May–July 2016. Addressing the *Knesset* on 30 May, Netanyahu declared a personal commitment to making peace "with the Palestinians and with all our Arab neighbors." From there he went on to say of the Arab Peace Initiative that it includes "positive elements," as expressed willingness "to negotiate with the Arab states revisions to that initiative so that it reflects the dramatic changes in the region since 2002."¹⁸ He then followed this up in July, declaring "more and more, I think this process could also run in the opposite direction. The normalization of advancing relations with the Arab world could help to advance peace ... between us and the Palestinians."¹⁹ Word that the Trump Administration has also favorably considered – and not excluded – the "outside-in" approach adds credibility as well as momentum to the regional strategy.²⁰

Conclusion: securing security

No Jewish-Israeli needs to be quoted the timeless biblical cautionary: "For you have not yet come to the resting place or to the inheritance, which the Lord, your God, is giving you" (*Deuteronomy*, 12:9). Entering upon the eighth decade of sovereignty, the constant shadow of perceived insecurity and external threat continues to hover over every aspect of Israel's national

being, and with it the still unresolved debate over exactly how Israel might still best secure its future in the modern Middle East. The suggestion here is that, in their different ways, the functional approach and regionalism warrant closer consideration as possible ways of moving towards a future that will provide security for both Israel and its neighbors.

Notes

- 1 “Ending the Conflict: Ensuring National Security,” *Mission Statement of the Peace and Security Association*. www.peace-security.org.il/?Lang=eng.
- 2 See Chapter 1.
- 3 Aharon Klieman, *Statecraft in the Dark: Israel’s Practice of Quiet Diplomacy*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988.
- 4 Israel Prime Minister’s Office, “Additional Remarks by PM Netanyahu at the Joint Statement With German Chancellor Angela Merkel,” February 16, 2016. www.pmo.gov.il/.../mediacenter/speeches/document/speechgermanyb160216er.
- 5 “President Abbas Proposes Peace Plan at Security Council,” full text of address delivered on February 20, 2018. *Wafa Palestinian News and Info Agency*, February 26, 2018. <http://english.wafa.ps/page.aspx?id=kwDnG6a96680021493akwDnG6>.
- 6 Both initiatives are documented and discussed in detail by Neil Caplan in his excellent study, aptly entitled *Futile Diplomacy. Vol. 3. The United Nations, the Great Powers and Middle East Peacemaking, 1948–1954*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.
- 7 “Israel Demands PA Prevent Attacks by Security Personnel,” *The Times of Israel*, February 1, 2016. www.timesofisrael.com/israel-demands-pa-prevent-attacks-by-security-personnel/
- 8 On the problematic role of third parties, see Saadia Touval, *The Peace Brokers: Mediators in the Arab–Israeli Conflict, 1948–1979*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- 9 The three notable departures being the bilateral peace talks with Egypt and then Jordan, as well as the secret 1993 Oslo gambit.
- 10 United Nations. General Assembly. “Letter dated October 8, 1993 from the Permanent Representatives of the Russian Federation and the United States of America to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General,” enclosing the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, including its Annexes, and its Agreed Minutes. A/48/486 S/26560, October 11, 1993. It was understood by both consenting parties that these negotiations were to cover all remaining issues: Jerusalem, refugees, settlements, security arrangements, borders, relations and cooperation with other neighbors and other matters of common interest.
- 11 Attendees included members of the Arab League (Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen), the G-8 group of industrialized countries, permanent members of the UN Security Council, fellow members of the international Quartet, members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and representatives of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.
- 12 The official version of the “Joint Statement” is in “President Bush Attends Annapolis Conference,” *US Department of State Archive*, November 27, 2007. <https://2001-009.state.gov/p/nea/rls/rm/2007/95695.htm>.
- 13 The remark is attributed to Dr. Husam Zomlot, head of the PLO General Delegation to the United States, in: Isabel Kershner, “A Quiet Jerusalem Neighborhood Gets a U.S. Embassy, and a Spotlight,” *The New York Times*, February 27, 2018. www.nytimes.com/2018/02/26/world/middleeast/jerusalem-us-embassy.html.
- 14 All three concepts – “ripeness,” “mutually hurting stalemate” and “mutually enticing opportunities” – are associated with the pioneering work on conflict resolution of I. William Zartman. See his: “Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond,” in: Paul C. Stern et al. (eds.) *International Conflict Resolution After the Cold War*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2000, pp. 225–250; and “Preventive Diplomacy: Setting the Stage,” in: William Zartman (ed.) *Preventive Negotiation: Avoiding Conflict Escalation*. Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, pp. 1–18.
- 15 Two useful studies on the Madrid-inspired functional approach are by Dalia Dassa Kaye, *Beyond the Handshake: Multilateral Cooperation in the Arab–Israeli Peace Process*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001 and *Talking to the Enemy: Track Two Diplomacy in the Middle East and South Asia*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007.
- 16 While the Arab Peace Initiative makes no specific reference to a direct negotiation platform, it does refer to “a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East” as the strategic option of the Arab countries. It also affirms the Arab countries would “Consider the Arab–Israeli conflict ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel, and provide security for all the states of the region” as well as then “establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.” This in return for Israel’s full withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, an agreed solution to the Palestinian refugee problem and establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. Official translation of the full text of the Saudi-inspired peace plan adopted by the Arab summit in Beirut can be found at <http://al-bab.com/albab-orig/albab/arab/docs/league/peace02.htm>.
- 17 The source for the “nothing without the United States and nothing with the United States alone” formulation is Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. Quoted in “EU Pledges \$53m to Help Build Palestinian State,” *Aljazeera*, January 31, 2018. www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/01/eu-pledges-53m-

[build-palestinian-state-180131185922690.html](#)]; also “E.U. To U.S.: ‘You Can’t Solve the Israeli–Palestinian Conflict Alone,’” *The Jerusalem Post*, February 2, 2018. www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/eu-to-us-you-cant-solve-the-israeli-palestinian-conflict-alone-540508.

- 18 *Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs*. <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2016/Pages/New-coalition-agreement-signed-30-May-2016.aspx>. Backing Netanyahu, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman added: “We must try to pick up the gauntlet. I absolutely agree that the Arab [Peace] Initiative also has some very, very positive elements that enable a serious dialogue with all our neighbors in the region.”
- 19 Gili Cohen, “Netanyahu: ‘Revolution’ in Arab Ties Could Advance Peace With Palestinians,” *Ha’aretz*, July 13, 2016. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/netanyahu-revolution-in-our-relations-with-arab-states-1.5409845. Warming up to the idea that the Egyptians, Jordanians, Saudis and Gulf States would in the end deliver the Palestinians, Netanyahu expanded on the theme in opening the winter 2016 session of the *Knesset*. Prime Minister’s Office, “Ne’um Rosh HaMemshala Netanyahu Biftichat Moshav HaChoref shel HaKnesset,” October 31, 2016.
- 20 See: Peter Baker and Mark Landler, “Trump May Turn to Arab Allies for Help With Israeli–Palestinian Relations,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2017. www.nytimes.com/2017/02/09/world/middleeast/trump-arabs-palestinians-israel.html.

The US–Israel security relationship

Daniel C. Kurtzer

The security relationship and dialogue between the United States and Israel is robust, mutually beneficial and unprecedented in diplomatic history in terms of its reach and depth. However, it was not always this way, and hence the history and dynamics of how the security relationship developed – despite periodic bilateral crises – are critical to understanding the durability and direction of US–Israeli ties. There is a rule of thumb in relationships between sovereign states, especially between a global power and a regional power: nothing is forever. This said, the US–Israeli security alliance could very well prove to be an exception, thereby providing Israel in the future with an extra sense of security-in-depth.¹

The relationship grows and develops

During the first 15 years of Israel’s independence, the United States adopted a largely hands-off attitude toward Israeli security needs and toward Israel more generally. Although the Truman Administration had recognized Israel as an independent state before any other country, Presidents Truman and Eisenhower both eschewed almost all forms of security assistance and cooperation. In fact, the United States supported an arms embargo on all the contesting Middle East countries, including Israel – the Tripartite Declaration of 1950 – and declined to provide security assistance to Israel, even though Egypt and others received such assistance from Soviet bloc countries. Initial US aid to Israel was limited to a 1949 \$100 million loan from the Export–Import Bank.

Only in 1962 did the United States accede to Israel’s requests to purchase arms, and in response to the Soviet decision to provide Egypt with long-range bombers sold Israel Hawk anti-aircraft missiles. Over the next five years further sales followed, largely to offset the unwillingness of European countries (for example, Germany) to provide arms to Israel and to sustain the equilibrium between Israeli and Arab arsenals. In this respect, the 1967 Six-Day War represented a dual turning point: France, thereto a major source of Israeli weapons, was angered by Israel’s decision to strike preemptively and suspended all further arms deliveries; and defense planners in Washington began to grasp the potential strategic significance of Israeli power in the region in the context of the Cold War. From 1967 on, the United States became the principal supplier of arms to Israel, including advanced military equipment unavailable to Israel’s enemies.

From the outset of this developing strategic security relationship, there existed significant areas of discord and disagreement. The most prominent were US concerns about Israel's undeclared nuclear weapons program and, following the 1967 war, the inception of Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories (although this was a relatively minor bilateral issue until the late 1970s). As early as the Kennedy administration, American officials pressed Israel to join the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to exhibit nuclear transparency by granting inspectors access to its nuclear sites. Israel partially opened such facilities, but generally kept the entire nuclear issue off limits. The Johnson administration either lost interest or became convinced that it could gain no further cooperation from Israel. In 1969, President Richard Nixon and Prime Minister Golda Meir reportedly reached an understanding: Israel agreed not to test a nuclear device or to declare its program publicly; in return, the United States would stop pressing Israel to join the NPT.²

In 1970, Nixon announced a new policy (subsequently termed the "Nixon Doctrine") which, while focusing initially on Asia, came to be understood as applying to the Middle East as well, especially to Iran and Israel. In his memoir, *RN*, Nixon wrote:

In the past our policy had been to furnish the arms, men and material to help other nations defend themselves against aggression ... But from now on ... we would furnish only the material and the military and economic assistance to those nations willing to accept the responsibility of supplying the manpower to defend themselves.³

The concept underpinning Nixon's thinking began to pay dividends almost immediately when, in response to an American request during the insurgency against King Hussein instigated by the PLO, Israel moved its forces to its border with Jordan, thereby deterring a Syrian invasion that would have toppled the Hashemite monarchy. Israeli arms also demonstrated their effectiveness during the 1969–1970 "War of Attrition" especially when Israeli fighter planes (French Mirages and US F-4 Phantoms) shot down five Soviet-piloted Mig-21 aircraft.⁴ Thus began a period of significant interest to US military planners, who valued the "demonstration effect" of the superiority of US arms over Soviet weaponry. Although Israel employed these arms in its own defense, it had become – in the minds of some in the United States – a front line ally in the global competition between the United States and the Soviet Union.

The 1970s witnessed an explosion of US–Israeli security cooperation, dramatically illustrated with the lifesaving airlift of replacement American arms to Israel during the 1973 War and the massive commitment of American military supplies that accompanied the 1975 Israel–Egypt second disengagement agreement (Sinai II) and the 1979 Israel–Egypt peace treaty.⁵ These were supplemented by generous financial arrangements. American military loans to Israel, amounting to \$30 million in 1970,⁶ jumped to \$545 million in 1971 and then mushroomed to \$2.482 billion in 1973–1974, as part of the resupply arrangements during the 1973 war. In 1976, grants and loans totaled \$1.5 billion; and by 1979 had risen to \$4 billion. Concurrently, economic loans and grants also increased substantially, from about \$750 million in the 1970s to almost \$2 billion in 1985, leveling off (as a grant) to \$1.2 billion after 1987. These figures do not include special assistance, which periodically increased the total substantially.⁷

The story of the US–Israel security relationship cannot be told, however, simply on the amount or quality of arms and assistance provided to Israel by the United States. As from the 1970s, the conceptual and strategic underpinnings of the bilateral security and strategic relationship developed and deepened – almost continuously. Worth noting, however, are the

several momentary departures from this overall pattern.

In the first instance, during the Sinai II negotiations in 1975 a serious crisis occurred when Prime Minister Rabin opposed the US-drafted agreement, and President Gerald Ford then announced “a reassessment” of the bilateral relationship. This included suspension of deliveries of purchased fighter jets and restrictions on US–Israeli official contacts. The crisis ended when Rabin accepted the American draft but not before the United States offered critical benefits and commitments to Israel in a secret side agreement. The United States assurances included, inter alia, a commitment to respond to Israeli military needs on a long-term basis. A guarantee of oil supplies to Israel if Israel could not secure oil on its own. A joint study of technological and sophisticated arms that Israel might require such as the F-16 fighter and the Pershing ground-to-ground missile. And a US pledge not to recognize or negotiate with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) unless that organization recognized Israel and accepted UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338.⁸

In a second instance, early in the 1980s, as Israel and the United States started talking about formalizing and institutionalizing strategic cooperation, an American decision to supply the AWACs airborne intelligence platform to Saudi Arabia led to a deep rift. Prime Minister Menachem Begin tried to work around the administration and convince Congress to vote to cancel the sale. He failed, but as a kind of “compensation,” in November 1981 the administration finalized a memorandum of understanding with Israel that established three strategic fora – the Joint Political–Military Group (JPMG), the Joint Security Assistance Planning Group (JSAP) and the Joint Economic Development Group (JEDG) – and also promised to fund the development of an Israeli fighter-plane, the Lavi.⁹ Significantly, the memorandum of understanding was specifically directed against threats to the region from the Soviet Union – not threats from within the region. However, over time, this distinction became increasingly insignificant as Israeli power grew in relation to its neighbors.

- 1 In addition, an evolving US commitment to ensure Israel’s qualitative military edge (QME) relative to all potential regional foes gradually became dogma and, as will be seen below, developed into the driving force behind an ever-increasing US role in Israeli R&D and technological achievements.

Indeed, after the 1980s, the relationship between the United States and Israel increasingly took on the character of an alliance of mutual benefits, notwithstanding the disparity in power between the two countries, the role the United States played as grantor of security assistance, or the quite different purviews (global versus regional) of the two parties. Further cementing this foundation of strategic *mutuality*, bipartisan American political support for Israel increased substantially, and the political influence of pro-Israel lobbying groups such as AIPAC helped ensure the stability of financial and security assistance to Israel in the legislative wrangling over foreign assistance.

- 2 So positive and conducive was the mix of factors governing US–Israeli ties that during the 1980s it seemed that virtually nothing could derail the further progress of the strategic relationship.

The two countries made their way past crises involving matters as varied as Israel’s use of American aircraft and equipment to destroy Iraq’s nuclear reactor in 1981, intensified Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories and legislation that cemented Israel’s hold on

Jerusalem (1980) and the Golan Heights (1981). The list of stressful issues and tense moments goes further: Fundamental disagreement over Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, siege of Beirut and tacit support given to Christian Phalangist forces as they massacred Palestinians in two refugee camps, Cancellation of American funding for the Lavi project (1987) and, not least, a crisis of trust when Jonathan Pollard, a Jewish US naval intelligence analyst, was arrested and convicted of passing American secrets to Israel (1985–1987).

The ability of the two countries to weather these storms, which seemed to dominate the 1980s, reflected the growing influence of Jewish and pro-Israel groups in domestic US politics; the singular focus of the Reagan administration on the Soviet Union; and the strength of the new mechanisms of strategic cooperation that kept the two countries talking to each other even in periods of stress.

To be sure, Israel's withdrawal from Sinai in 1982 as part of the Israel–Egypt peace treaty and the losses suffered by US Marines in Lebanon to *Hisbullah* terror in 1983 helped cement the relationship and buttress it against ripples of tension which continued into the next decade, as illustrated when the United States under President Clinton in 2000 vetoed Israel's attempt to sell the Phalcon weapons system to China.¹⁰

Of considerable significance for both at the time and later was the signing of a classified memorandum of understanding in 1986 that brought about Israeli participation in the US “Strategic Defense Initiative,” a project of particular importance to Reagan, which provided an opening for Israel and the United States to partner in the co-development of the Arrow ballistic missile defense system.¹¹ Within the year, Congress designated Israel as a major non-NATO ally (thereby equating Israel's relations with the United States to those of Japan, Australia and South Korea), a status which opened new opportunities for bilateral exchanges and for Israeli companies to participate in defense production.¹² The US Defense Department also began to preposition American War materiel in Israel.

Following the 1987 cancellation of US funding for the Lavi program, US–Israeli military cooperation intensified. US provision of F-16 aircraft came with an agreement that allowed Israel to upgrade certain components; Congress authorized Israel in 1987–1988 to use 26% of US security assistance to support its domestic arms industry, a benefit granted to no previous recipient of American assistance; as of 1988 US defense contractors began to enter into major contracts with Israeli firms.¹³ For its part, Israel continued to provide important political and military intelligence information to the United States. In the mid-1950s, the *Mossad* obtained and shared with Washington Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin; and following the 1967 Six-Day War Israel provided NATO with captured Soviet military equipment. In 1989, a Syrian pilot defected to Israel with his Mig-23 Soviet fighter aircraft, which Israel then shared with the United States.

A serious test of the burgeoning security relationship occurred in 1991, during the first Gulf War, when the United States requested that Israel avoid responding to Iraqi SCUD missile attacks, out of concern that Israeli military action would threaten the integrity of the US military coalition, which included Egyptian and Syrian forces.¹⁴ To help Israel deal with the SCUD threat, the United States deployed the Patriot anti-missile system in Israel with US crews and offered upgraded intelligence on the battlefield situation. Both the request and the deployment of Patriots constituted a significant departure from precedent. Hitherto, the policy implications of the security relationship appeared to flow in one direction: the United States provided assistance to help Israel defend itself and project power in the region. Moreover, the US request required Israel to depart from a basic tenet of its defense doctrine; namely, that an Arab threat or attack

would not go unanswered. Nevertheless, Israel did commit not to respond to Iraqi attacks, provided that Iraq did not employ weapons of mass destruction and that there were no substantial Israeli casualties. However, there was a sense that Israel had paid a high price in the erosion of its deterrence against threats emanating from regional foes.

During the 1990s and beyond, the level of US assistance rose to \$3.1 billion annually (not including special grants for specific Israeli programs, such as missile defense). In 2007, the United States and Israel signed an agreement promising Israel \$30 billion in security assistance during the following decade; and in 2016, the two countries concluded an MOU promising \$38 billion over the next ten years, with a gradual phasing out of the 26% in offshore procurement that had been allocated to Israel's domestic defense industry. Still, not even the enormity of these sums could hide the fact that the substantive nature of the relationship had branched out from an essentially "security assistance" model. The two countries were now engaged in a more complex relationship involving joint research and production of high technology defense items, in particular missile defense systems, such as Arrow and THEL (tactical high energy laser, a program that was ultimately scrapped in 2006 because of high costs), and subsequently Iron Dome, Iron Beam and David's Sling.

Moreover, the United States agreed to integrate Israel into the US satellite missile alert system, providing real-time warning of a missile launch directed at Israel.¹⁵ There followed enhanced intelligence exchanges and joint training, necessitating a tidal wave of military and security officials traveling back and forth between the two countries. There was thus established on the foundations laid in earlier years an incredibly diverse superstructure of a security alliance, flexible enough to include new areas of cooperation such as cyber threats and cyber warfare.

Building a strategic alliance

Concurrently, the political–military security relationship between the two countries evolved and intensified. From the 1970s onward, the United States became deeply enmeshed in the search for Arab–Israeli peace. It helped broker the Sinai I (1974) and II (1975) disengagement accords between Israel and Egypt; the Israel–Syria disengagement agreement (1974); the 1978 Camp David Accords and the 1979 Israel–Egypt Peace Treaty; and the 1991 Madrid Peace Conference. Differences persisted during this and later periods over some fundamental issues in the peace process – in particular the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories. Nevertheless, the two countries agreed that the United States alone possessed the requisites for fulfilling the essential role of third-party intermediary by assisting Israel and the Arabs to shape a final peace settlement.

At the same time, the United States became Israel's protector in international fora where an almost automatic majority of Arab states and their supporters adopted strident resolutions designed to isolate Israel. While the United States could not obstruct anti-Israel resolutions in the UN General Assembly or in some of the UN Specialized Agencies, its use of its veto power in the UN Security Council minimized the international opprobrium often directed against Israel.¹⁶ More specifically, since 1948, there have been 226 UN Security Council resolutions related in some fashion to Israel; most of these have been routine resolutions extending the mandate and term of UN peacekeeping units, such as UNIFIL in Lebanon. Regarding resolutions singling out Israel for criticism, the United States has voted for 24 resolutions and abstained on 23 other resolutions. Most recently, the Obama Administration vetoed a resolution on settlements in 2011

and abstained on a resolution (Resolution 2334) related to the peace process in 2016.¹⁷

The intensification of the bilateral security relationship was concomitant with the growth in the threat from terrorism worldwide. *Al Qaeda's* attack against the United States on September 11, 2001, helped bring home to Americans the danger of terrorism that Israel had faced for many years. While US officials continued to press Israel to address Palestinian discontent, considered a result of occupation and thus as a driver for some of the terrorism directed against Israel, counter-terrorism cooperation between Israel and the United States developed rapidly and intensively after 9/11. The US Department of Homeland Security's Office of International Affairs focused special attention on areas of cooperation with Israel. The US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) initiated an agreement to work with Israel on joint training and exercises. Starting in the 1990s, individual American states dispatched police and first responders to Israel to assimilate lessons learned and share experiences in dealing with policing, law enforcement and related civilian issues in times of emergency. During that same period, US National Guard officials began to work with the Israel Defense Forces Home Front Command regarding responses to natural disasters and terrorist attacks.

US views of Israeli nuclear policy likewise shifted during the early twenty-first century. The United States tried and then abandoned efforts to bring Israel into a fissile material cut-off initiative. It also blocked repeated efforts by Egypt and others to single out Israel for criticism for not joining and adhering to the NPT. During the George H.W. Bush administration, American officials reversed earlier criticism of Israel's 1981 destruction of Iraq's Osirak nuclear plant; and, in 2007, the United States remained silent in the aftermath of the destruction of Syria's nuclear reactor, widely attributed to an Israel air strike.

In furtherance of the institutionalization of the security relation, in 2008, the US Congress passed P.L. 110-429, the Naval Vessel Transfer Act that formally defined the meaning of ensuring Israel's qualitative military edge:

the ability to counter and defeat any credible conventional military threat from any individual state or possible coalition of states or from non-state actors, while sustaining minimal damage and casualties, through the use of superior military means, possessed in sufficient quantity, including weapons, command, control, communication, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities that in their technical characteristics are superior in capability to those of such other individual or possible coalition of states or non-state actors.

... The President is asked to carry out an] empirical and qualitative assessment on an ongoing basis of the extent to which Israel possesses a qualitative military edge over military threats to Israel.

... Certification is required for proposed arms sales] to any country in the Middle East other than Israel ... [to include] a determination that the sale or export of the defense articles or defense services will not adversely affect Israel's qualitative military edge over military threats to Israel.¹⁸

In furtherance of these objectives, over a period of years the United States agreed – over the initial objection of the Defense Department to Israel's demand that it be allowed to install its own electronic warfare equipment – to sell Israel the advanced F-35 aircraft. The US increased the value of military stockpiled equipment in Israel to \$800 million. The US signed a new

agreement to help fund and produce the Arrow III missile interceptor; provided more than \$700 million in special assistance to the Iron Dome anti-rocket system; and continued to fund development of David's Sling.

Perhaps the most serious test of the US–Israel security relationship unfolded during the administrations of President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, which overlapped between January 2009 and January 2017. At least four factors led to a serious rift between the United States and Israel. Distrust of Obama fed by (erroneous and malicious) allegations that he was a Muslim. His past associations with people perceived as anti-Israel, such as his pastor in Chicago. His ambition to progress toward peace that led him, in the first instance, to demand a complete freeze on Israeli settlements while asking little of the Palestinians. A brutal dispute with Netanyahu over the terms of the Iran nuclear deal, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.¹⁹ And a toxic personal relationship between the two leaders that spilled over into the public domain with nasty press leaks directed at each other.

Despite these profound differences over policy and between leaders, both sides lauded the US–Israel security and strategic relationship in unprecedented terms:

Prime Minister Netanyahu told the AIPAC conference on May 23, 2012, that “Yesterday President Obama spoke about his ironclad commitment to Israel’s security. He rightly said that our security cooperation is unprecedented ... And he has backed those words with deeds.”

In a July 25, 2012, speech to the Israeli National Security College, Defense Minister Ehud Barak said, “The security ties between us and the current administration are at the highest level they have ever been. The administration is consistently strengthening the depths of Israel’s security abilities. The decision to expand the Iron Dome system with US financial backing is yet another expression of this deep connection and commitment.”²⁰

Despite mutual rancor, the bedrock of US–Israeli security and intelligence cooperation not only remained firm, but the dynamics of that relationship have also continued to improve. This was notwithstanding the Iran nuclear deal, which senior Israeli defense officials – breaking with their Prime Minister – publicly praised. The IDF Chief of Staff reportedly said: “The deal has actually removed the most serious danger to Israel’s existence for the foreseeable future and greatly reduced the threat over the longer term.”²¹ Agreeing with this analysis, former *Shin Bet* director Carmi Gillon wrote:

Through the JCPOA, the major world powers came together to ensure – without a single shot being fired – that Iran dismantled key nuclear infrastructure and submitted itself to thorough monitoring and inspection. Two years later, the results are in, and they show the effort has been a clear success.²²

Retrospect and prospects

By the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, the US–Israeli strategic and security relationship remains firm and vibrant. The relationship continues to deepen and expand in response to new security challenges and the pressing need facing both countries to deal with

metastasizing threats, in particular, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of terrorism. In a changing global environment marked by a weakening of state power and interstate alliances, and with the concomitant rise of non-state actors and empowered individuals, the United States and Israel have found it mutually beneficial to develop new ways to cooperate. This span encompasses research and design of new technologies in weapons systems and new methods and tactics for coping with evolving threats. Indeed, the trajectory of the US–Israeli security alliance continues upward, seemingly immune from the periodic political differences – even crises – that mark the overall bilateral political relationship.

Can this alliance continue, or will it be subject to the normal vicissitudes of international relations in which interests change and relationships evolve and devolve? Normally, alliances are not assumed to be forever, and they rest on the persistence of a commonality of interests – be they positive interests such as trade and economic ties, or negative interests, that is, banding together against a common enemy. Common interests can also be grounded in moral and value affinity, though these are far less certain in the context of different political systems that produce a new leadership every few years.

More than 30 years ago, the benefits of the US–Israeli relationship were described in terms that remain relevant today:

Israel can be viewed in the global military contest from five perspectives: its intelligence techniques, the implications of its battlefield experiences, the combination of a tight defense budget and a penchant for innovation, the effect of its activities on the calculations of Soviet planners, and the impact of its military performance on the reputation of US arms.²³

Of significance, a more recent analysis came to the same conclusions.²⁴ The authors assert that the strong and enduring bilateral relationship contributed to Israel’s willingness to return territory as part of the peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Further, according to this view, Israeli deterrence, bolstered by US assistance and the pledge to maintain Israel’s qualitative superiority over any combination of Arab enemies, has prevented the outbreak of a major war between Israel and Arab states. The authors further argue, somewhat counter-intuitively, that the relationship has also bolstered America’s relations with the Arab world, which understands that only the United States can ultimately persuade Israel to take risks for peace with the Palestinians and others.

Underpinning this and similar analyses is the notion that there exists an enduring “strategic logic” to the relationship. Israel is seen as a western outpost in a volatile region that, over time, has become ever more unstable and dangerous. Israel’s commitment to western values and norms is seen as a barrier to the rise of alternative ideologies. And its military strength and political stability help deter Arab states from aggression and adventurism. Moreover, Israel’s steadfastness in the face of almost constant terror and the lessons it has learned from this experience become valuable tools that can be studied and applied by other states now likewise compelled to confront the challenge of terrorism.

This argument is strengthened by more concrete examples of how the bilateral alliance has been of tangible mutual benefit and is not just a one-way street for the provision of substantial US security assistance to Israel. Some of the elements of mutuality include:

- Intelligence cooperation, in which Israel’s focus on the region complements the global purview of the American intelligence community;

- Advances in missile defense against both short- and long-range weapons, a clear benefit to Israel in its battles against *Hamas* and *Hizbullah*, but also of importance to US forces deployed globally;
- Cooperation in counter-terrorism, homeland security, cyber security and law enforcement in which lessons learned and tactics and techniques are shared, and in which joint training and exercises improve the capabilities of both countries; and
- Development of new weapons technologies, in which there is a reinforcing dynamic between the large weapons platforms developed by the United States and the avionics and electronics advances developed by Israel.

According to this view, the security relationship between the two countries is strong and vital.

It appears that prevailing opinion in Washington, likely echoed in Jerusalem, also continues to seek ways of enhancing further the bilateral security relationship. A joint American–Israeli analysis has suggested several initiatives to ensure the continuity of ties:²⁵

- 1 Enhance joint strategic planning and elevate the bilateral strategic dialogue ...
- 2 Advance a more proactive regional strategy together ... [b]oth countries need to conduct more advance joint strategic planning on all fronts, including planning for contingencies on the Iranian nuclear issue ...
- 3 Prevent unhelpful moves on the Israeli–Palestinian front and try to move the parties toward a resolution ... Israeli leaders need to come to terms with the fact that the United States has an enduring interest, expressed across administrations, in a two-state solution. If they do not, continued tensions with the United States will be inevitable ...
- 4 Advance a mutually agreed framework for updating the US-Israel relationship ... The future framework should be based on two pillars of partnership: security and economics ...
- 5 Insulate long-term common strategic interests from domestic politics and tactical disputes.

These ideas appear logical and are consistent with the long-term trajectory of the relationship, in which both sides have sought mechanisms and conceptual understandings to deepen and strengthen concrete forms of cooperation, and anticipate future challenges and threats. Since the 1980s, it has been possible to add to existing institutional ties, create new forms of cooperation and increase tangible levels of mutual support, in particular, US security assistance to Israel, which now totals well over \$4 billion annually. In so doing, the two sides have been able to bridge political and diplomatic gaps between them, or to agree to disagree. The question is whether such papering over of fundamental disagreements related to core interests will be possible in the future, too.

Assessed against four major issues, that query does not yield a simple answer.

First, since 9/11, the United States has committed substantial resources to fighting terrorism, including drawn out deployments of substantial US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq. Although this military engagement has been largely effective in degrading terrorist networks, the price has been high and fatigue has set in. Perceptions of American withdrawal from global leadership may be overdrawn, but they are not entirely baseless.

Presidents Obama and Trump have been extremely cautious about committing American personnel to small wars in the Middle East; and Trump has gone even further through his ambivalent attitude toward international conventions (such as the Paris climate accord), US and international agreements (such as the Iran nuclear accord) and even longstanding American alliances, such as NATO. For Israel, the contraction of American power and withdrawal of

American leadership carry significant consequences. Indeed, Israel's deterrence has long benefited from the strength and leadership of the United States; if this erodes, even should the US–Israel bilateral relationship remain strong, Israel's international standing will be negatively affected.

A second and related issue is the rising power of China and the muscular approach of Putin's Russia. In the short-term, Israel has managed to develop positive relations with both countries, giving it some room to maneuver in a changing global power picture. But neither China nor Russia has as deep a commitment to Israel as does the United States, and both countries are transactional powers that will always measure profit and loss from relations with Israel vis-à-vis other parties in the Middle East.

A third issue of concern is whether the instability and shifting geopolitics of the Middle East, the rise of non-state actors, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction will impact Israel's peace treaties with Egypt and Jordan. Egypt and Jordan are relatively stable for now. Their relations with Israel are intact and have withstood the destabilizing impact of recent regional events. Israel can take significant comfort in the fact that even the Muslim Brotherhood, during its brief period in power in Egypt, showed no signs of undermining the treaty. For the foreseeable future, Egypt will be consumed by instability at home, especially in Sinai, and will turn to Israel for intelligence and tangible assistance. Jordan, too, continues to withstand the pressures of the Arab uprisings and remains committed to ensuring quiet along the Jordan River. Yet Israel has little influence over the long-term prospects for stability in these countries. In addition, Israel's attention has been focused on Syria, where Iranian (and *Hizbullah*) gains threaten to destabilize the situation in Israel's north. Given Russia's enduring commitment to the Syrian regime, which ties Russia to Iranian interests in Syria as well, Israel could face a serious strategic threat if Iran is permitted to embed itself militarily in Syria.

The fourth issue is the peace process, or rather the absence of a peace process. Regardless of the political rhetoric that US presidential candidates adopt, the reality is that US interests dictate that the effort be made to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In this regard, Israeli settlement activity and occupation practices always get in the way of smooth political relations between Washington and Jerusalem. While differences over the peace process have not derailed the security relationship in the past, they constitute a major distraction and irritant for both countries.

Against this backdrop of an historically organic and dynamic US–Israeli security relationship that, at times, has been buffeted by different national strategic interests and different perspectives, priorities and perceptions of regional and global trends, perhaps the most effective measure of the durability of the relationship is whether it will continue to serve mutual, fundamental security interests and needs of the two countries.

A compelling case for a positive answer is presented in a monograph by Michael Eisenstadt and David Pollock. Its authors lay out systematically the manifold ways that the American relationship with Israel has been of tangible benefit to the United States.²⁶ To be sure, the benefits to Israel from the relationship far outweigh whatever gains accrue to the United States. Furthermore, there are significant voices that take issue with the underlying argument and try to make the case that the relationship has become so skewed in favor of Israeli interests that those interests tend to dominate in Washington over US national interests.²⁷ However, given the political underpinning of the bilateral US–Israeli security relationship in Washington and the realization in Israel that its long-term interests reside in maintaining and enhancing ties with Washington, the already-robust ties between the two countries are the closest thing to an enduring fact in international relations.

Future challenges

In the normal calculation of interests between friends and allies, there is a constant evaluation of the relationship between benefits and costs. The foregoing analysis has demonstrated that the United States and Israel have thus far assessed that the mutual benefits of their relationship as outweighing the costs and periodic policy differences. This cost–benefit calculus will be tested, however, in the years to come by at least eight factors:

- Iran’s ambitions to develop a nuclear weapons capability, the Obama Administration’s support for the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and Israel’s adamant opposition to that diplomatic deal will remain a serious irritant in the relationship for years to come. Despite US assurances that it will hold Iran to a high standard of compliance with the JCPOA’s provisions, Israel believes Iran will incrementally violate the agreement and the international community will not do enough to stop Iran from continuing its nuclear program. Withdrawing from the JCPOA, as the Trump Administration did in 2018, carries equally problematic implications for the US–Israeli relationship given the uncertainty that the United States would then act unilaterally to stop the Iranian program;
- Israel’s dependency on US assistance will diminish significantly over time, as its own defense industries mature and as it diversifies the sources of arms imports. Israel will continue to look to the United States for the most sophisticated technologies and for large platforms, such as aircraft, where the United States outperforms all other arms suppliers. However, as the Israeli economy grows, Israel will at some point become a net buyer, rather than an assistance recipient, of US arms, and that aspect of the bilateral security relationship will change accordingly;
- The United States and Israel are, to a degree, competitors in arms sales. While the relative volume of exports weighs extremely heavily in the United States’ favor, problems have developed in the past and could recur in particular niche markets and/or involving sensitive weaponry. Of particular concern to the United States are Israeli exports to China that contain sensitive technologies, as well as Israeli exports to conflict zones in which American or international diplomacy is active.
- Budgetary issues and a growing “America First” sentiment among the American electorate will also work against expanding security or other assistance to Israel. As the federal budget contracts, and as domestic programs such as Medicaid come under scrutiny, it will be harder to argue for expanded assistance to Israel;²⁸
- If American policy continues on a course of gradual disengagement from the Middle East and a “pivot” to Asia, Israel will find itself confronting several pressing regional challenges without the prospect of significant US involvement. The most urgent situation is in Syria, where the outcome of the civil war could leave Iran and its *Hizbullah* ally in a much stronger regional position, with Russia – rather than the United States – playing the role of dominant global power. Not only will this complicate and worsen Israel’s security posture on its northern border, but it will also change the calculations of countries like Jordan and Saudi Arabia, who will need to accommodate to new regional power alignments;
- These developments could prompt Israel to revive but modify a version of its 1950s strategy of “alliances with the periphery,” that is, trying to find support from states in and on the edge of the region to counterbalance the rise of Iran. For this to happen, Israel would need to strengthen ties to the Saudis and Gulf states, improve relations with Turkey, foster ties

with Russia and China, and build improving relations with India. All of this is possible, but the quid pro quo from these countries likely will be movement on the Palestinian issue, not a simple proposition for Israel;

- Today, Israel enjoys what appears to be unshakeable bipartisan domestic political support in the United States that undergirds US diplomatic support for Israel internationally. American politics are in flux, however, and attitudes are changing in ways currently unforeseeable. The rise of a strongly progressive wing within the Democratic Party holds out the possibility of more criticism of Israeli policies toward Palestinians. The Republican Party, ostensibly anxious to seize the mantle as Israel's strongest supporter, contains elements that are anti-Semitic. Israel's comfort level within the "Washington Beltway" may be tested in the period ahead as the American political system sorts itself out;
- And there are even signs of concern for Israel in its relations with the American Jewish community. Israel's policies in the occupied territories are now the subject of much criticism from many younger American Jews. The situation on US college campuses is fraught with problems, as activists in favor of the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement seek to build alliances with liberal Jewish students. Israel's approach to Jewish religious issues is also alienating large segments of the conservative and reform Jewish communities who feel isolated by policies largely dictated by ultra-Orthodox rabbis in Israel.²⁹

The United States–Israel security relationship is strong and resilient enough to cope with these challenges in the period ahead and to maintain momentum. As deep and extensive as ties are now, some issues remain for discussion, perhaps most notably whether the two countries can and should conclude a mutual defense treaty³⁰ and whether Israel might be considered for membership in NATO should it desire to be a member.³¹ While the idea of a treaty or NATO membership for Israel appears alluring, both are unlikely to happen: neither Washington nor NATO members will likely agree to formally extending a security umbrella to Israel, and Israel will likely balk about yielding some freedom of action against its adversaries.

Whether formalized in new agreements or not, inertia and mutual interests will carry this relationship further in an upward trajectory for some time to come. Whether trends in the region, the United States and Israel continue to support this positive trajectory over the longer term remains an open question.

Notes

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17

Israel's evolving relationship with American Jewry

A matter of national security

Dov S. Zakheim

Today, a diminishing number of American Jews recall the creation of the State of Israel and its war of Independence just three years after the Holocaust and World War II. Moreover, American Jews under the age of 55, the majority of the contemporary American Jewish population, have no real memory of the Six-Day War or the threatening events that led up to it. For at least five decades, perhaps six, these two factors were prime motivators for American Jewish support of Israel. That no longer appears to be the case. Instead, for virtually their entire lifetime, younger American Jews quite probably only know of a powerful Israel – an Israel that continues to occupy disputed territory. This development marks a major change in the nature of American Jewish advocacy for Israel.

Emerging from the shadows

Guilt over its failure to respond more effectively to the implications of the Holocaust drove most of the American Jewish community – non-Zionist as well as Zionist – to advocate for the creation of the State of Israel.¹ The majority of American Jews had remained passive about the fate of their co-religionists throughout World War II, many unable to believe or comprehend that the Nazis were systematically exterminating Europe's Jews. Moreover, even when they did attempt to force the US government to act, their efforts were largely ineffective.² Only once news of the Holocaust became widely known did American Jewry press the US government to push an increasingly antagonistic British government to make good on Balfour's 1917 promise to create a homeland for Jews in Palestine.

Jewish activism increased even more as the 1948 presidential election approached. American Zionists organized massive demonstrations in New York, whose electoral votes were likely to have an outsized influence on the election's outcome. They further intensified their activities towards November 29, 1947, when the UN General Assembly was scheduled to vote on the partition of Palestine. Zionist leaders, Rabbi Stephen Wise and Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, tried

particularly hard to ensure that the American delegation would vote in favor. Although their efforts encountered opposition from an anti-Semitic State Department bureaucracy and antagonized President Harry S. Truman, ultimately he did decide to vote in favor of a Jewish state. On May 15, 1948, Truman then extended Israel *de facto* recognition within moments of its declaring independence: in part thanks to the entreaties of his former business partner, Eddie Jacobson; in part because of his humanitarian instincts; and in part because of the strong support of his senior advisor, Clark Clifford.

With the outbreak of Israel's War of Independence, which commenced immediately after the UN vote in November 1947, groups of American Jews began to donate significant sums of money to the Zionist cause, much of it used to purchase desperately needed armaments. Some individuals also volunteered their services as soldiers and military advisers in Israel's nascent defense forces. However, these efforts were still not coordinated.³ Not until 1949, did nine different Zionist groups, hitherto often at odds with one another, come together to create the American Zionist Council (AZC). Two years later, the Council's director, I.L. ("Sy") Kenen created the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs, an offshoot of the AZC, geared to public relations and lobbying the Congress on behalf of Israel. The new umbrella organization enjoyed considerable success where economic aid to Israel was concerned.

As early as 1949, the US Congress approved \$100 million (equivalent to some \$1.03 billion in 2017 dollars) in as a combination of grants and loans for resettlement of refugees in Israel. Between 1951 and 1965 economic aid to Israel, comprised of loans – repaid in full – and grants, rose from \$35 million in 1951 to \$93 million in 1962 (\$330 million and \$754 million). The Jewish community also poured money into the new state in the form of Israel Bonds. Created in 1950, the bonds program, which still functions, has to date raised over \$35 billion to support a host of Israeli infrastructure and other social and economic projects.⁴

On the other hand, none of the American Jewish groups managed to influence security policy towards the Middle East, which was initially decidedly lukewarm as far as Israel was concerned. Although the American–British–French Tripartite Declaration that the Truman Administration negotiated in 1950 promised neutrality between Israel and the Arabs, it in effect embargoed American military assistance to Israel – a policy the Eisenhower Administration continued to support.

In 1955, as tensions between Israel and her Arab neighbors mounted, a multitude of Jewish organizations attempted to lobby the State Department on Israel's behalf. The Eisenhower Administration, in response, insisted that the community create a single point of contact with which it could communicate, thereby willing into existence the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations.⁵ Even this development, as well as the efforts of Philip Ehrlich, David Zellerbach and Eli Ginzberg, all of whom were close to Eisenhower, exerted little impact on his highly negative reaction to Israel's collusion with Britain and France in the 1956 Suez Campaign.⁶

The community remained plagued by internal rifts within and among the various Zionist organizations, while facing both ongoing State Department hostility and the Eisenhower Administration's seeming indifference to the threats to Israel's security. As a result, it could only stand by helplessly as the Administration threatened that the US government would terminate all financial assistance to Israel and launch a Justice Department investigation of the tax-exempt status of Jewish organizations supporting Israel unless all IDF forces withdrew from the Sinai Peninsula.

American attitudes towards Israel barely changed when Kennedy assumed office. The new

President was especially suspicious about Israel's development of a nuclear weapons program at Dimona. He sought to have the facility inspected by American experts and was reluctant to accept Ben Gurion's assurances it possessed no military function. Nevertheless, in 1962 the Administration broke with precedent when authorizing the first major arms sale to Israel (of defensive Hawk ground-to-air missiles). On the other hand, in the same year it also required the American Zionist Council to register as a foreign agent. Six weeks later, however, Keren responded by creating yet another entity, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

Shortly after assuming office in 1963, Lyndon Johnson approved the first direct sale of tanks to Israel, an act that evinced his increasing sensitivity to the Jewish community, in particular, its ability both to lobby Congress for more military aid to Israel and to prevent arms sales to the Arabs.⁷ Moreover, Johnson entertained the hope that by assuaging Jewish concerns regarding Israel he might garner support in the community for America's operations in Vietnam, which many American Jews opposed.⁸

A force to be reckoned with

Jewish organizations wielded increasing influence on Capitol Hill, especially AIPAC, which was usually authorized to speak on behalf of the Presidents' Conference and which became "the major point of contact between American Jews and Congress, and ... the only group formally registered to lobby on behalf of legislation affecting Israel."⁹ Spurred by AIPAC, Congress began to appropriate financial assistance for Israel even before the White House could determine the desired level of that assistance.¹⁰ In addition, Jewish individuals continued to be directly influential with the president and in the executive branch.

Notwithstanding his large number of Jewish confidants,¹¹ and despite adopting a seemingly more positive attitude toward Israel than had his predecessors, Johnson sat on his hands as Egypt and Syria seemed poised to annihilate Israel in the spring of 1967. American Jewry responded very differently. During the run-up to the Six-Day War American Jews raised \$240 million (about \$1.75 billion in current dollars) on Israel's behalf. The crisis, evoking memories of the Holocaust for many American Jews, together with Israel's subsequent stunning victory "injected life into the American Jewish relationship with Israel... . Israel's vulnerability and victory in that fight fired ... the souls of American Jewry."¹² An energized AIPAC also brought pressure to bear on President Johnson, who in 1968, his last year in office, approved the sale of top-of-the-line F-4 fighter aircraft (not delivered until some years later, however), thereby establishing the United States as Israel's main arms supplier.¹³

The two-track pattern thus established – active Jewish lobbying of Congress coupled with influence exerted by individual Jews close to the President – persisted through the Nixon, Ford and Reagan presidencies. The results were soon apparent. By 1971, the Nixon administration began to abandon its previous support for the Rogers Plan – a plan opposed by the Israel lobby and by Nixon's long-time Jewish supporter and confidant, Max Fisher, that in effect would have imposed a Middle East settlement.¹⁴ After some delay, it also authorized the final sale of both the F-4s and the smaller A-4 attack aircraft that Johnson had approved. In the same year and thanks to AIPAC's intense lobbying of the Congress, Senator Henry "Scoop" Jackson and his [mostly Jewish] aides successfully managed the passage of an amendment to the Fiscal 1972 Defense Appropriations Bill providing \$500 million in military credits, half of which would pay

for the F-4s sought by Israel. These triumphs capped in 1973, when American Jewry successfully lobbied Congress for \$50 million in resettlement aid funds to facilitate Soviet Jewish absorption into Israeli society.¹⁵

Success was not unadulterated. The Jewish community encountered intense opposition from the Administration over the Jackson–Vanik amendment (which finally passed in 1974) that sought to deny Most Favored Nation status to the Soviet Union until it permitted Soviet Jews to emigrate. Worse still, during the disastrous first days of the Yom Kippur War its efforts to ensure that the United States would replenish Israel’s losses of arms elicited no response.¹⁶ Nixon’s eventual decision to airlift supplies to Israel reflected his assessment of crucial strategic and geopolitical interests rather than domestic Jewish considerations.

Although American Jewry once again raised vast sums on Israel’s behalf (equivalent to \$4.1 billion in today’s dollars), its political clout remained circumscribed. This was again manifest in 1974, when the Administration refused to underwrite Israel’s conditions for carrying out a second withdrawal from the Sinai. Max Fisher’s frequent personal visits to the Oval Office did not prevent President Gerald Ford from mooting the notion of a “reassessment” of American aid to Israel, nor from suspending negotiations on Jerusalem’s request for F-15 fighters, delaying a shipment of Lance surface-to-surface missiles and canceling scheduled diplomatic meetings. AIPAC responded by persuading 76 senators to sign a letter urging Ford to support Israel in any future negotiations with Egypt.¹⁷ Ultimately, however, such pressure only succeeded in averting the threatened “reassessment” thanks to the imminence of an election year.¹⁸

Championing Israel’s security needs

In retrospect, Menachem Begin’s victory in the May 1977 elections marked an inflection point in American Jewish relations with Israel. American Jewish leaders, overwhelmingly liberal, secular and supporters of the US Democratic Party, felt deep affinity with the moderate socialist secular leaders who had governed Israel since its creation. Begin could not have been more different: a man of the political Right, a traditional Jew who would liberally quote from the Scriptures; and who welcomed the ultra-Orthodox Agudat Yisrael party into his governing coalition.

American Jewish leaders were aghast, but they quickly came to terms with reality and continued to support Israel as unflinchingly as they had in the past. Their backing was especially necessary in view of the policies advocated by President Jimmy Carter. As early as March 1977 he had upset the Israelis and the American Jewish leadership alike by suggesting to then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin that Israel negotiate with, if not recognize, the PLO.¹⁹ Altogether, Carter came to regard Israel as the primary obstacle to a peace settlement predicated on its withdrawal to the pre-Six-Day War borders (the “Green Line”).²⁰

AIPAC responded by mounting a campaign critical of Carter’s Middle East initiatives, and for the remainder of his term in office continuously censured the President and his leading advisors, notably National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. The impact of these activities, together with the pressure brought to bear by other leading community organizations, became evident as early as October 1977. Confronted by angry – and coordinated – American Jewish and Israeli reactions, Carter backtracked on a plan to bring the intensely anti-Israeli Soviet Union into the negotiations.²¹ This episode is what spurred Egypt’s Anwar Sadat to opt for a bilateral agreement with Israel that did not initially involve Washington.²²

Arguably, Carter’s greatest success in the Middle East, and perhaps the greatest

accomplishment of his presidency, was his management of the negotiations that resulted in the 1978 Camp David Accords and the peace treaty between Israel and Egypt a year later. Here, too, American Jewry could claim some credit, since a prominent Jew, Leon Charney, a Democrat with close ties to leading officials in Washington and Jerusalem, played a critical backstage role as an intermediary between the two capitals.²³

Despite the success of the Egypt–Israel agreements, and the massive increase in American aid which they underpinned (US aid to Israel rose from \$1.8 billion in 1978 to nearly \$4.9 billion in 1979), Carter harbored increasingly negative views of Israel that were strongly supported in the Pentagon and indeed in the US national security community at large. Throughout his presidency, however, Congress, where key Jewish legislators worked closely with AIPAC, remained a bastion of support for Israel. This was a critical counterweight. As one key advisor put it, “even a popular president will worry about losing the support of the Jewish community as elections approach. For a weak president, especially a Democrat, this can be a significant consideration.”²⁴ This proved to be the case in the 1980 presidential elections. Unable to allay the suspicions of the pro-Israel Jewish community, Carter won only 40% of its vote – the lowest percentage by a Democratic candidate in 80 years – a figure matched by his Republican opponent, Ronald Reagan, long known to be a friend of Israel.

Reagan’s Secretary of State, Alexander Haig, was also a friend of Israel; in addition, he “had a healthy respect for the political clout of the American Jewish community.”²⁵ Moreover, a number of leading Jewish Republicans enjoyed access to Reagan, including Max Fisher, Gordon Zacks, Richard Fox and Albert Spiegel. Even so, tensions between the administration and Israel were unavoidable. In response to Israel’s 1981 attack on the Iraqi Osirak reactor, the Administration put a hold on the delivery of four F-16 fighters and suspended a Memorandum on Strategic Cooperation only recently signed with the Israelis. Likewise, the proposed US sale of airborne warning and control (AWACS) aircraft to Saudi Arabia went ahead in 1981, notwithstanding AIPAC’s efforts to get Congress to block the deal. According to Moshe Arens, appointed Israel’s ambassador to Washington shortly after the fight over the AWACs deal, this incident gave the Reagan White House “the first taste of power that Israel’s supporters commanded.”²⁶ Yet it also demonstrated that when the Administration – indeed any Administration – was determined to pursue a policy in America’s best interests, it would successfully do so regardless of both Israel’s perception of that policy and the strength of American Jewish opposition to it.

The Reagan Administration and the Jewish community clashed again after Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982 when AIPAC, working with its friends in Congress, succeeded in winning the passage of a \$250 million supplemental appropriation to help Israel pay for its war costs and its ongoing presence in the country. Reagan responded by threatening to rupture the relationship if Israel did not withdraw. Nor were matters improved by a brief period of tension between the US Marines stationed in Beirut and local IDF units.²⁷ Ultimately, the US evacuated its troops from Lebanon after the Marine barracks in Beirut was bombed in October 1983; and Israel, having withdrawn from the city in August, pulled back further south to the Litani River in 1985. Still, the Congressional action of three years earlier rankled with the Reagan White House.

The Reagan Administration generated more tension when it questioned continued funding for development of Israel’s Lavi fighter aircraft. Initially Moshe Arens, now Israel’s Defense Minister (1983–1984) managed – with help from AIPAC – to persuade Congress to channel funds directly toward Lavi development through a unique program called “Offshore Procurement” (OSP). When Caspar Weinberger asked me to review the Lavi’s progress, I found

Israeli program cost estimates for the plane to be far too low. Continued development of the plane, and its production, would soak up all of Israel's foreign assistance funds for years to come. Supported by a team of military and civilian technical and cost experts, I concluded there were better, and less expensive, American alternatives. Yitzhak Rabin, Arens' successor as Defense Minister, supported my effort, but Arens himself and the American Jewish community bitterly opposed it.

Controversy over the Lavi's future raged for two more years, with the Jewish American leadership remaining staunchly in support of the program, and the Department of Defense steadfastly opposed. By one vote, the Israeli Cabinet finally terminated the program in 1987, releasing funds for what eventually became Israel's naval and armor modernization programs, the development of its missile defenses and the promotion of its high technology sector.²⁸ The decision (which Arens continued to criticize for years to come²⁹) represented another stinging loss for the organized American Jewish leadership, which had continued to support the project to the end.

Undaunted by these confrontations, the Jewish community continued to work with Congress to enhance the security of the Jewish State. AIPAC lobbied for successive increases in OSP funding (initially meant only to support the Lavi program) and was a major advocate for what became the Israeli-American Arrow missile defense system. In addition, Congress' decision in 1987 to name Israel a "major non-NATO ally" stands as still another creative AIPAC initiative.

The Jewish community generally viewed Reagan as a friend of Israel, despite the clashes over AWACS, Lebanon and the Lavi. Its attitude toward George H.W. Bush (elected President in 1988), and especially towards his Secretary of State, James Baker, very much differed. The President did not have a good personal rapport with Israel's Prime Minister, Yitzhak Shamir; moreover, and notwithstanding his record of assistance to the emigration of Ethiopian Jewry to Israel when he had been Reagan's Vice-President, he frequently clashed with the American Jewish community and its leaders. Bush riled the latter in 1991, when he threatened to withhold loan guarantees to Israel if it continued to construct new settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and shocked them when, during the course of a press conference that year, he publicly complained about American Jewish support of Israel.

The community reserved most of its fury, however, for Bush's close friend and confidant, Secretary of State James Baker, whom it mistakenly considered an outright anti-Semite. Baker had a terrible relationship with Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe Arens (who returned to office as Israel's Foreign Minister 1988-1990 and Minister of Defense, 1990-1992) who had cultivated very close ties with the American Jewish leadership.³⁰ Nor did Baker help himself by being the point man for American efforts to reach out to the Palestinians or for infamously commenting "Fuck the Jews; they didn't vote for us anyway." The Jewish community responded by voting overwhelmingly for Bill Clinton, who denied Bush re-election as President in 1992.³¹

Clinton was as popular with the Jewish community as Bush had been unpopular. He developed a close rapport with Yitzhak Rabin, who became Israel's Prime Minister in mid-1992. Although Clinton's State Department initially underrated the secret Israeli-Palestinian contacts fostered by the Norwegian Government,³² the new president seized upon the progress made by the two sides and prodded them to the historic agreement signed on the White House lawn on September 13, 1993. Clinton's support for Israel was generally unstinting. Although he too opposed settlement expansion, unlike his predecessor he rarely clashed with AIPAC on this issue.

George W. Bush likewise was a strong supporter of Israel, as were many of his most senior

appointees. Israel continued to receive large amounts of aid, including for its increasingly important missile defense program. During the Bush presidency, the Jewish community was widely regarded as wielding enormous influence at both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue – so much so that, in some quarters, American Jewry came under attack for seemingly sacrificing America’s interests in favor of Israel’s.³³ It was certainly strong enough to overcome residual opposition within the bureaucracy to expanding American assistance for Israel. I recall that in the early years of the first Bush Administration, the head of the Missile Defense Agency sought to reduce funding for the Arrow program. Serving as the DoD’s most senior budget officer, I was able to convince him it was pointless to reduce funding for the program because, thanks to an increasingly influential AIPAC, Congress would probably not only restore the funds but even augment them.

Challenges to solidarity

Toward the end of the twentieth century, while at the governmental level working relations between Israel and the USA seemed to be harmonious, tensions began to simmer between individual Israelis and American Jews, even those strongly supporting the State of Israel. As one frequent visitor to Israel noted accusingly, “The average Israeli does not particularly care about American Jewry.”³⁴ It was becoming increasingly clear that as Israeli society matured and developed its own unique culture, the shared sensibilities that had hitherto united Israelis with American Jews were beginning to fade.

Most American Jews spoke little or no colloquial Hebrew, which meant that Israeli culture was virtually closed to them.³⁵ They may have bought expensive apartments or stayed in luxury hotels when visiting Israel, but had little sense of what life was like for ordinary Israelis. Many of them conducted business with Israelis; few reportedly enjoyed the experience.

Finally, the American Jewish mainstream had little in common with Israel’s growing ultra-Orthodox *haredi* population or its political leaders, who had become increasingly powerful since their parties first joined Menachem Begin’s coalition in 1977, often playing the role of kingmakers thereafter. Undoubtedly the highest political *haredi* priority was expanded government funding for their academies (*yeshivot*), to whose students they also desired to supply additional financial assistance. Increasingly, however, their horizons widened, to embrace control over all Jewish religious life in the Diaspora as well as in Israel.

This program was epitomized by the sustained and vocal campaign the newly empowered *haredi* parties launched with the purpose of revising the Law of Return, enacted by the *Knesset* in 1950, granting citizen rights to all Jews who made Israel their home. As first amended in 1970, prior to *haredi* participation in the ruling coalition, provisions of the law extended to anyone (and his/her spouse) who could prove descent from a single Jewish grandparent or who had converted to Judaism. Once in Government, the *haredi* parties began pressing for another revision that, although ostensibly small, carried explosive implications. Specifically, they insisted on the insertion of a clause stating conversions be recognized only if carried out “according to *halakhah* [traditional Jewish law as interpreted by Orthodoxy].” If passed, this amendment at a single stroke would not only deny automatic citizen rights to persons converted under non-Orthodox auspices but would also deprive them of recognition as Jews. The original and primary targets of *haredi* attentions were the hundreds of thousands of immigrants to Israel after the late 1980s from the Soviet Union and its successor states, many of whom the *haredim*

refused to recognize as Jewish.

However, their proposed amendment also brought them into direct conflict with the vast majority of American Jews belonging to non-Orthodox streams of Judaism. The *haredi* insistence on their own interpretation of the criteria for Jewish affiliation constituted a serious blow to the sense of legitimacy of American Jews and their spiritual guides, 90% of whom belonged to non-Orthodox congregations.³⁶ On the other hand, the proposed *haredi* amendment was supported by members of the American Jewish ultra-orthodox community whose influence had greatly increased in recent years owing to both its high birth rate (which contrasts strongly with numerical decline of the non-*haredi* segments) and to its cohesiveness.

The result has been a blurring of conventional geographical distinctions. The dispute among Israelis over “who is a Jew?” is now mirrored by rival segments of American Jewry. Although the Law of Return has not (to date) been amended in accordance with *haredi* wishes, its provisions have been undermined by the *haredi* domination of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, which has sought to invalidate – even retroactively – Reform, Conservative and Modern Orthodox conversions and has refused to recognize rabbinical certifications of an individual’s Jewishness (the so-called blacklist of American rabbis). Such moves have generated an increasingly vocal backlash among all but the Centrist Orthodox and *haredi* segments of American Jewry. As much was indicated in 2014 when the American Jewish Committee created a Jewish Religious Equality Coalition (J-Rec). This body, which I have chaired since its inception, for the first time brings together Modern Orthodox, Conservative, Reform and Reconstruction organizations and individuals to work with Israeli counterparts in lobbying for the termination of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate’s monopoly over personal status matters, notably conversions and marriage.

A parallel development has occurred with respect to Israel’s settlement expansion in the West Bank and the absence of progress in Israel–Palestinian negotiations. Here, too, opinion divides not just within Israel but also within American Jewry. Much of that situation is attributable to divisions generated by the feeling President Obama was becoming alienated from Israel, as indeed was the Democratic Party, for whose candidates – including Obama – most Jews had traditionally voted.³⁷

In some respects, this image was an illusion, fostered by the misplaced emphasis, fostered by hardline Israel advocates, on the President’s Muslim parenthood on his father’s side. In fact, Obama supported increases in security assistance to Israel; the ten-year \$38 billion aid package that he signed in September 2016 was the largest ever of its kind.³⁸ Any favorable impression, however, was seriously diluted in many American Jewish minds by the President’s repeated and often public confrontations with Prime Minister Netanyahu on the settlements question.³⁹

The originality of this situation lay in the rifts that it exposed, and exacerbated, within the Jewish community. Even before Obama’s election to office, a number of his leading Jewish supporters had helped found J-Street, an avowedly “peace-oriented” organization created to offset the influence of AIPAC, whose pro-Israel policies had moved increasingly to the right, even when Yitzhak Rabin was Prime Minister. The George W. Bush Administration ignored J-Street, as well as older, similar groups such as Americans for Peace Now, whereas Obama and his top officials embraced the new advocacy group. Indeed, the appearance of National Security Advisor Jim Jones as keynote speaker at J-Street’s first annual conference in October 2009 served as the turning point in its rise to influence in Washington. Significantly, Michael Oren, Israel’s Ambassador to the United States, who was usually present at all major American Jewish conferences and dinners, refused an invitation to attend.

With tacit support from the White House, J-Street continued to garner a growing number of

supporters. At the same time, a pro-Palestinian movement created in 2005 to boycott, disinvest or sanction (BDS) Israel due to its settlements policy – but also seeking the return of Palestinians to “all Arab lands,” meaning on both sides of the Green Line – began to gain support from Jews on the left of the American political spectrum. In particular, a growing number of Jewish students on American college campuses indicated their support for BDS, while Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), initially a fringe organization founded in 1996 that the Anti-Defamation League soon after described as “the largest and most influential anti-Zionist group in the United States,”⁴⁰ emerged as a vocal supporter of the BDS movement.

There are no hard figures delineating American Jewish support for BDS. However, polls indicate a declining level of support for Israel among the more than 85% of American Jews who are not Orthodox. A Pew poll taken in 2013 found that only 24% of Reform Jews and 16% of non-affiliated Jews consider themselves “very attached” to Israel, while 29% of Reform Jews and 51% of the non-affiliated consider themselves “not very attached” to Israel or “not attached at all.”⁴¹ Yet Reform Jews continue to constitute the largest American Jewish denomination, at about 35 percent.⁴²

Matters are very different among the Modern Orthodox, who number at most only 4% of American Jewry.⁴³ Seventy-seven percent of this community consider themselves to be “very attached to Israel while only one percent are” not very attached.⁴⁴ Support for Israel’s settlements policy is also stronger in Modern Orthodoxy than in any other communal segment,⁴⁵ perhaps because so many Modern Orthodox Jews have family ties, often children and grandchildren, to West Bank Jewish residents.

Moreover, support for Israel’s settlements policy increases as one moves the further to the right on the Modern Orthodox religious spectrum, while support for a two-state solution decreases sharply as one moves from liberal (31 percent) to centrist Orthodoxy (3 percent).⁴⁶ The overall picture is personified by America’s current Ambassador to Israel, best identified as centrist modern Orthodox. A vocal supporter of settlements, the State Department has had to disavow his pronouncements on this issue.⁴⁷

Even among the American Modern Orthodox, however, there are warning signs of a declining level of support for Israel. Whereas 87% of Modern Orthodox Jews over the age of 55 report a strong emotional connection to Israel, only 65% among those under 34 do so. More ominously, while 71% of the over 55s attach much importance to activity on behalf of Israel, only 43% of the under 34s feel the same way.

The waning of American Jewish support for Israel was highlighted by the debate within the community over support for the American-inspired nuclear agreement with Iran, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Program of Action (JCPOA). Despite Prime Minister Netanyahu’s passionate opposition to the agreement, 59% of American Jews supported the agreement when announced; once signed, 60% did so. These findings reveal the degree to which American Jews may no longer share the same security perspectives as the current government of Israel.⁴⁸

The growing divide thus evident between Israeli and American Jews is not only political and religious but cultural too. Less than one-half of American Jews have visited Israel; those who do so with any regularity are primarily members of the tiny Modern Orthodox community.⁴⁹ Moreover, as already noted, even frequent visitors feel little cultural affinity with Israelis. They do not speak the local language and therefore have no way of truly accessing Israeli culture.⁵⁰

Several hundred thousand Israelis live in the United States. They maintain their own cultural organizations and read Hebrew newspapers. Until recently, they maintained little contact with

American-born Jews and did not have much formal interaction with American Jewish organizations. Neither were they themselves organized into a formal grouping. In 2007, however, a group of Los Angeles-based Israeli-American business leaders and philanthropists created the Israel–American Council, whose mandate was to strengthen ties with the rest of American Jewry and in particular with pro-Israel organizations. In 2013, the Council rebranded itself as the Israeli American Council (IAC), with offices in most major American cities. Nevertheless, while the IAC clearly has brought Israeli-Americans closer to other American Jews, it does not appear to have had much impact on the attitudes of American Jewry, particularly among the younger generation.

Birthright Israel, which came into being in 1999, does represent a major effort to reach out to younger American Jews, as well as younger Jews from elsewhere in the Diaspora. Some 400,000 young Jewish Americans have visited Israel thanks to grants from the Birthright Israel Foundation. Nevertheless, Birthright’s impact on the attitudes of young Jewish Americans – like that of the IAC – is highly uncertain. On the one hand, there is some evidence that Birthright participants have a lower rate of intermarriage than does the community at large.⁵¹ On the other hand, however, Birthright does not seem to have altered the political attitudes of many of its participants. Similarly, while various Israeli organizations, notably the Jewish Agency, have for many years been dispatching emissaries (*shlichim*) to communities around the United States, it is unclear whether they have had more than a minor impact on the views of those with whom they interact during their two- or three-year stints in America.

Facing the future

The implications of the trends here itemized are troubling, for both the unity of the Jewish people and Israel’s national security.

Given a new American Jewish generation with no recollection of the Yom Kippur War (let alone the 1967 war) that identifies Israel as “occupier” of Palestinian lands and a semi-theocracy rejecting any but the Orthodox, it comes as no surprise that young college-age Jews embrace non-Zionist and even anti-Zionist political positions. That American Jewish financial support represents an ever-diminishing percentage of Israel’s per capita Gross Domestic Product (which now outstrips that of several Western European countries) only somewhat moderates the material dangers inherent in that position.⁵²

Right-wing Israelis might also be encouraged by evidence showing that the American white Evangelical community of Christians, comprising more than a fourth of the US population,⁵³ evinces even more support for both security assistance to Israel and its settlement expansion than does the Jewish community.⁵⁴ However, these are comparatively minor compensations. While non-Jewish support for the State is certainly welcome, if Israel is to remain the Jewish homeland, then it must ensure that the largest community in the Diaspora identifies it as such. Ultimately, it would be nothing short of tragic were the preponderance of American Jews to turn their backs on Israel.

The onus for averting that disaster is on Israel, which simply cannot afford to forfeit the active engagement of the American Jewish community – an engagement that ever since the 1960s has been absolutely essential in ensuring that the United States continues to champion Israel’s national security. Israelis, who in the main tend to be insensitive to the rumblings emanating from Diaspora Jewry, finally must respond in a constructive manner to the concerns of American

Jews, and indeed of other Diaspora Jews, too. Failure to do so could undermine, and ultimately fatally weaken, the greatest Jewish enterprise in two millennia.

Notes

- 1 Jonathan Adelman, *The Rise of Israel: A History of a Revolutionary State*. London: Routledge, 2008, p. 180. Numerous studies have addressed this issue.
- 2 Henry L. Feingold, “Could American Jews Have Done More,” in: Alex Grobman and Daniel Landes (eds.) *Critical Issues of the Holocaust: A Companion to the Film Genocide*. Los Angeles, CA: Simon Wiesenthal Center and Dallas: Rossell Books, 1983, p. 308.
- 3 Adelman, *The Rise of Israel*, p. 180.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 185.
- 5 Sidney Schwartz, *Judaism and Justice: The Jewish Passion to Repair the World*. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights, 2006, p. 90.
- 6 Adelman, *The Rise of Israel*, p. 184.
- 7 Robert David Johnson, *Lyndon Johnson and Israel: The Secret Presidential Recordings*. Tel Aviv: Abraham Center, 2008, especially pp. 31–32. www.tau.ac.il/humanities/abraham/publications/johnson_israel.pdf.
- 8 *Ibid.*, pp. 74–76.
- 9 Marvin C. Feuerwerker, *Congress and Israel: Foreign Aid Decision-Making in the House of Representatives, 1969–1976*. Westport, CT and London: Greenwood, 1979, p. 91.
- 10 Natan Aridan, *Advocating for Israel: Diplomats and Lobbyists From Truman to Nixon*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017, p. 243. Nevertheless, AIPAC failed to get Congress to pass legislation against the Arab boycott.
- 11 These included Arthur Goldberg, the US ambassador to the UN; Abe Fortas, whom Johnson named to the Supreme Court (from which he was compelled to resign for continuing to advise Johnson); Edwin Weisl, appointed Assistant Attorney General in 1965; and Abe Feinberg, a wealthy manufacturer with close ties to Israel. David Johnson, *Lyndon Johnson and Israel*, p. 21.
- 12 Joyce Starr, *Kissing Through Glass: The Invisible Shield Between Americans and Israelis*. Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1990, p. 145.
- 13 Johnson, *Lyndon Johnson and Israel*, p. 21.
- 14 Aridan, *Advocating for Israel*, pp. 258, 268–69. Until 1975, the US fiscal year began July 1 of the previous year; FY 1972 outlays therefore commenced in July 1971.
- 15 Peter Golden, *Quiet Diplomat: Max M Fisher*. New York and London: Cornwall, 1992, p. 276.
- 16 Dennis Ross, *Doomed to Succeed: The U.S.-Israel Relationship from Truman to Obama*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015, p. 143.
- 17 Ford initially dismissed the letter as “being distorted out of all proportion.” Yehuda Avner, *The Prime Ministers: An Intimate Narrative of Israeli Leadership*, 3rd edition. New Milford, CT: Toby, 2010, p. 288.
- 18 Golden, *Quiet Diplomat*, pp. 313–343, *passim*.
- 19 William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics*. Washington, DC: Brookings, 1986, pp. 43–48, *passim*.
- 20 Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 177.
- 21 Quandt, *Camp David*, pp. 123, 131–132.
- 22 Ross, *Doomed to Succeed*, p. 158. On Sadat’s reluctance to make the Americans aware of Egypt’s initial contacts with Israel, see Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations*. New York: Knopf, 1981, p. 47.
- 23 Wolf Blitzer, *Between Washington and Jerusalem: A Reporter’s Notebook*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985, p. 63.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 12.
- 25 Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Ya’ari, *Israel’s Lebanon War* (trans. Ina Friedman). New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984, p. 64.
- 26 Moshe Arens, *Broken Covenant: American Foreign Policy and the Crisis Between the U.S. and Israel*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995, p. 27.
- 27 Eric Hammel, *The Root: The Marines in Beirut August 1982–February 1984*. San Diego, CA and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985, pp. 61–66.
- 28 See my *Flight of the Lavi: Inside A US–Israeli Crisis*. Washington, DC: Pergamon, 1996. See also Kobi Richter, “I Opposed Building Israeli Fighter Jet Based on the Truth,” *Ha’aretz*, October 2, 2017. www.haaretz.com/opinion/premium-1.815182.
- 29 Arens, *Broken Covenant*, pp. 11–12.
- 30 Baker has long been accused of being an anti-Semite. He is not, nor for that matter is Bush, who as Vice-President during the Reagan years oversaw the American airlift of thousands of Ethiopian Jews and approved a similar airlift when president in 1991.
- 31 Anne E. Korblut, “The Bushes and the Jews: Explaining the President’s Philo-Semitism,” *Slate*. www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2002/04/the_bushes_and_the_jews.html.
- 32 Johan Holst, the Norwegian Foreign Minister, told me in 1993 that when he informed the State Department of the secret

Israeli–Palestinian channel, State’s Policy Planning office dismissed it as just one of many such attempts to foster reconciliation between the parties.

- 33 In particular, see John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007.
- 34 Starr, *Kissing Through Glass*, p. 161.
- 35 A 2013 Pew Research Poll found that only 37 percent of Modern Orthodox Jews, 14 percent of Conservative Jews and 2 percent of Reform Jews could converse in Hebrew. Alan Cooperman et al., “A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Connection With and Attitudes Toward Israel,” *Pew Research Center*, October 1, 2013. www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-5-connection-with-and-attitudes-towards-israel/
- 36 The likelihood of a clash had earlier become apparent when, in 1983, the rabbinical leadership of the Reform Movement, the largest organized denominational organization in American Jewry, determined that “the child of [any] one Jewish parent is under the presumption of Jewish descent.” This decision directly challenged traditional Orthodox halakha, which mandates the criterion of matrilineal descent.
- 37 This became vividly clear at the 2012 Democratic convention, where three votes had to be taken before what was asserted to be a voice-vote majority could insert into the party’s platform its previously held position that Jerusalem was Israel’s capital.
- 38 Matt Spetalnick, “U.S., Israel Sign \$38 Billion Military Aid Package,” September 14, 2016. www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-israel-statement/u-s-israel-sign-38-billion-military-aid-package-idUSKCN11K2CI.
- 39 These are described at great length by Michael Oren, who served as Israel’s ambassador to Washington during the Obama years. Michael B. Oren, *Ally: My Journey Across the American-Israeli Divide*. New York: Random House, 2015.
- 40 “Jewish Voice for Peace,” *ADL Resources*. www.adl.org/education/resources/profiles/jewish-voice-for-peace.
- 41 Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Connection With and Attitudes Toward Israel,” October 1, 2013. www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-5-connection-with-and-attitudes-towards-israel/
- 42 Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Jewish Identity,” October 1, 2013. www.pewforum.org/2013/10/01/chapter-3-jewish-identity/.
- 43 Pew Research Center, “Connection With and Attitudes Toward Israel.”
- 44 Mark L. Trencher, “The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews,” *Nishma Research*, September 28, 2017. <http://nishmaresearch.com/assets/pdf/Report%20-%20Nishma%20Research%20Profile%20of%20American%20Modern%20Orthodox%20Jews%2009-27-17.pdf>.
- 45 A 2016 Pew poll put the percentage of Modern Orthodox Jews at 3 percent. Neha Sahgal, Alan Cooperman et al., “Israel’s Religiously Divided Society: Comparisons Between Jews in Israel and the U.S.,” *Pew Research Center*, March 8, 2016. www.pewforum.org/2016/03/08/israels-religiously-divided-society/
- 46 Pew Research Center, “Connection With and Attitudes Toward Israel.” Thirty-eight percent of Modern Orthodox Jews believe that settlement construction aids Israeli security. The equivalent number for ultra-Orthodox American Jews is 31 percent. Only 23 percent of Conservative Jews, and 13 percent of Reform Jews would agree.
- 47 Trencher, “The Nishma Research Profile of American Modern Orthodox Jews.”
- 48 Ilan Ben Zion, “Washington Clarifies US Ambassador’s Israeli Settlements Remarks,” *Financial Times*, September 29, 2017. www.ft.com/content/9bc87130-a480-11e7-9e4f-7f5e6a7c98a2.
- 49 Daniel Wagner, “How the Iran Deal May Impact Israel’s Influence,” *Huffington Post*. www.huffingtonpost.com/daniel-wagner/how-the-iran-deal-may-imp_b_7996648.html.
- 50 Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans: Connection.”
- 51 While 67 percent of ultra-Orthodox Jews claim that they can converse in Hebrew, their point of reference is invariably Biblical or medieval Hebrew, rather than modern Hebrew. Pew Research Center, “A Portrait of Jewish Americans.”
- 52 Judy Maltz, “Birthright Alumni Marry Later – and Are More Likely to Marry Jewish,” *Ha’aretz*, June 12, 2013. www.haaretz.com/jewish/premium-1.529422.
- 53 Individual institutions in civil society remain heavily dependent on American donations. See Dov S. Zakheim, “The U.S.-Israel Aid Dilemma,” *The National Interest*, September/October 2016, p. 12.
- 54 Estimates for the size of the Evangelical community vary. A 2015 Pew study, probably the most rigorous of all such polls, found that 25.4 percent of all Americans describe themselves as Evangelical Christians. Another 1.6 percent are Mormons, who also tend to be supportive of the State of Israel.
- 55 No less than 46 percent of white Evangelicals believe that American support for Israel is “not supportive enough” (!), while only 12 percent consider it is too supportive. These figures contrast with 31 percent of American Jews, and 26 percent of mainline Protestants who feel that American support is insufficient: Michael Lipka, “Strong Support for Israel in U.S. Cuts Across Religious Lines,” *Pew Research Center*, February 27, 2014. www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/02/27/strong-support-for-israel-in-u-s-cuts-across-religious-lines/

Part IV

Pursuing security

18

Israel's security model

Avi Kober

Members of Israel's security establishment – a group that includes senior civilian as well as military figures – periodically seek to formulate a coherent national security conception. Two systematic efforts have been made thus far into the twenty-first century: the first in 2006 by a team headed by *Knesset* member Dan Meridor (a former chairperson of the *Knesset* Foreign Affairs and Security Committee); the second and most recent by IDF Chief-of-Staff Gadi Eisenkot, who in 2015 released a document entitled “The IDF's Strategy.”¹

This chapter reduces both documents into their constituent parts in order to reconstruct the operative Israeli security model and to analyze it in three stages. The first part summarizes the principal components of the security conception that dominated Israeli thinking during the initial decades of statehood. The second part focuses on the changes, global as well specifically Israeli, which thereafter necessitated re-formulations. Finally, the chapter identifies the essential ingredients of Israel's current security model.

Israel's traditional security model

Israel's foundational security model was relatively straightforward, a characteristic reflecting its crystallization at a time when high-intensity conflicts (HIC) were the dominant type of conventional state-to-state warfare, and when most of Israel's enemies were states with shared borders.

This security model rested on three pillars – deterrence, early warning and battlefield decision.

- The first – deterrence – offered obvious military advantages for a state that considered itself committed to the status quo, and was therefore prioritized in Israel's initial security thinking;
- Early warning was necessitated by the IDF's reliance on reserve forces, which in an emergency would require time to fully mobilize. Hence, despite several intelligence failures and not living up to expectations, Israel invested considerable resources in upgrading its early warning capabilities;
- Deterrence and early warning were justifiably considered vulnerable – the one, because based on psychological perceptions and images; the other, because it was the intellectual product of human assessors, who might differ over interpretation of raw intelligence data.

Battlefield decision, on the other hand, was considered the backbone of the triad, and the pillar Israel would be compelled to fallback upon should the first two fail.

Quite apart from the expectation that quick and decisive results would facilitate the translation of military achievements into political gains, battlefield decision was also mandated by more specific needs. To enable Israel's reservists to return to their civilian occupations; and to preempt external Great Power intervention on the Arab side as well as Arab expeditionary forces arriving on the scene of fighting.

The traditional security model further dictated that were Israel to confront a coalition of Arab foes, battlefield decisions would be attained sequentially, on one front after another. Prior to the 1970s, that strategy was facilitated by Israel's enjoyment of favorable conditions for battlefield maneuver and offense, two crucial conditions for military victory. Battlefield decision was to be spearheaded by the armored corps, making the tank the IDF's dominant ground weapons system. The role of the air force was to provide the ground forces with freedom of action and the IDF as a whole with an extended reach. The notion that battlefield decision could be achieved by means of airpower was considered illusory

Quantitative inferiority vis-à-vis an Arab War coalition has always constituted an obvious restraint on Israel's freedom of strategic choice. The traditional security model therefore sought to compensate for that disadvantage by a series of force multipliers. Significantly, technology did not head the list; although believed relevant to almost every aspect of Israel's security conception, it was not considered all-powerful or decisive. Far more importance was attached to the offense, augmented by the employment of the indirect approach, the concentration of forces or by *Blitzkrieg*.

Indeed, during the early years of statehood commitment to the offense attained the status of a cult, not least because it seemingly offered a means of transferring the war to the enemy's territory, thereby deflecting the need to absorb hostile attacks on Israeli soil. However, during the 1980s advocates for a more balanced offensive/defensive approach dared challenge the priority of offensive warfare. Reacting (albeit belatedly) to lessons from the 1973 October War, these advocates pointed out the constraints placed upon maneuver and offense by Arab sophisticated anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons systems.

In time, four supplements became integral to the traditional security model. First, preparing for plausible worst-case scenarios, such as fighting against an Arab War coalition on more than one front simultaneously, or against a superpower. Second, self-reliance in both the conventional and non-conventional spheres. Third, the backing of at least one Great Power before, during and after war. Fourth, balancing Arab hostility by establishing and maintaining regional alliances with non-Arab and/or non-Muslim states and minorities.

Changing conditions

Serious though they undoubtedly were, the security threats that confronted Israel during the first decades of statehood appear relatively simple when compared to those of today. Most obviously is this so in terms of their diversity. In addition to the continued prospect of traditional ground warfare, Israel in recent decades has been called upon to address an unprecedented multiplicity of military spaces: subterranean (particularly attack tunnels); dense urban areas; over the horizon (especially attacks by missiles, rockets and sundry types of drones, armed or unarmed); the sea; outer space; and cyberspace.

Yet two additional changes really bear principal responsibility for re-shaping Israel's security model in the past two decades. The first is the emergence of Low-Intensity Conflicts (LICs) as the most common conflict mode, both globally and in Arab-Israel relations; the second is the ascendancy of firepower over maneuver. Each of these changes warrants independent analysis.

The impact of the prevalence and dominance of LICs

It is important to emphasize that the non-state actors Israel has fought on the LIC battlefield since the 2000s have reduced their inferiority to the IDF. Today, non-state actors such as *Hizbullah* and *Hamas* possess advanced military instruments such as missiles, rockets and technologies capable of reaching and disrupting the stronger side's civilian rear, blurring the distinction between weakness and strength. They also demonstrate high proficiency and sophistication in exploiting mass communication and social media, conducting psychological operations, directing different messages to different audiences, conducting cyber warfare, etc. In sum, they are capable of waging what has been referred to as "hybrid wars," a capability accentuated in the Israel-Arab arena by the ideological fanaticism of the non-state players.²

In addition, LICs pose more specific dilemmas.

In LICs the stakes tend to be lower

Research indicates that in western democracies engaged in war, toleration for casualties declines in relation to the perceived importance of the interests and principles for which the country is ostensibly fighting.³ Judged by that gauge, LICs tend to reduce casualty tolerance precisely because they do not threaten vital interests, let alone national survival.⁴ Objectively speaking, they have never really imperiled Israel's existence, and so the only way to change that perception is to manipulate public opinion and to encourage a greater readiness to sacrifice by depicting the LIC as a primary threat. That is precisely what Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Chiefs-of-Staff Shaul Mofaz and Moshe Ya'alon attempted to do during the second *Intifada*, which erupted in the year 2000. Indeed, Ya'alon even declared that round of hostilities second in importance only to Israel's War of Independence.⁵

Consequently, tensions between casualty aversion and operational effectiveness on the battlefield have not been resolved. If anything, they have been exacerbated. Two phenomena, both pointed out by observers of IDF performance in recent LIC operations, are of especial relevance. One is the tendency to consider the death of Israeli soldiers in LIC action as less acceptable than that of Israeli civilians;⁶ the second is the inclination of commanders to allow responsibility for the lives of their troops to overshadow their commitment to fulfilling a given mission.⁷

- *Tension between moral and judicial constraints and operational efficiency*

LICs are known to heighten tensions between competing and sometimes contradictory values of security, on the one hand, and both the discriminate and proportional use of force plus respect for civil liberties, on the other. In its report on the management of the Second Lebanon War, the Winograd Commission considered that by seeking to alleviate the contradiction, IDF commanders had evinced growing reliance on legal advice in the course of military operations.

The Commission criticized this process of “legalization,” whereby responsibility in the field was liable to shift from commanding officers to legal advisers and could divert commanders’ attention from their operational challenges.⁸

The ascendancy of firepower over maneuverability

The relationship between two variables – firepower and maneuverability – has always been dialectical and deeply affected by technological changes. In turn, the firepower/maneuver ratio has affected the offense/defense ratio and prospects for attaining battlefield decision. In the past the ascendancy of firepower usually strengthened defensive capabilities, while the emphasis on maneuverability created favorable conditions for the offensive. Since firepower lacked the range of today’s weapon systems, maneuver was often required to make firepower feasible and effective. On the other hand, maneuver without firepower proved ineffective.⁹

The present era of firepower dominance creates new possibilities in the interplay between firepower and maneuverability. One is attack without prior maneuver. Another is employing firepower to recreate suitable conditions for maneuver; for instance, by opening corridors enabling ground forces to break into the enemy’s rear. Furthermore, concentration of fire to some extent has replaced the traditional concentration of forces. However, it is not yet possible to determine whether battlefield decision is attainable at the strategic level without first maneuvering and attacking on the ground.

In April 2006, the IDF issued a new operational doctrine. This document reflected the continued discrepancy between power capabilities deployed by Israel and its non-state enemies, and also the IDF’s (unstated) commitment to the use of firepower rather than maneuver. However, the belief that technology could win wars almost unaided was shattered during the Second Lebanon War that broke out a few months later, in June 2006. The events of that conflict bore out earlier assessments by American military experts, who had warned that Israel’s emphasis on technology was overshadowing its attention to the non-material aspects of strategy and tactics, such as the art of war. And that overreliance on firepower for battlefield success might have a weakening effect on traditional military capabilities such as close combat or combat intelligence.¹⁰

Israel’s current security model

Notwithstanding these changes in Israel’s operational and/or psychological environment, the three basic components of the country’s traditional security model – deterrence, early warning and battlefield decision – nominally remain in place. However, their current depiction is often at odds with past understandings of their centrality. Moreover, in some areas they are clearly in the process of being both updated and also supplemented by concepts novel to the Israeli experience.

In the following pages, each of these developments is discussed in turn.

Refinements to the traditional triad

Deterrence

The commitment to deterrence (the first pillar of the traditional security doctrine) remains pronounced, especially with respect to Iran.¹¹ It is also applied to LIC situations and is stressed in the *IDF's Strategy* issued in August 2015. The latter employs concepts such as “deterrence operations,” whose declared purpose is to prolong periods of quiet between wars to the extent possible.

Here, practice has preceded doctrine, especially against non-state enemies. Ever since the turn of the twenty-first century, the use of massive, concentrated firepower has been characteristic of the Israeli way of war against non-state adversaries. In this context, two rationales have predominated: sparing the lives of IDF troops and spoiling the non-state enemy's appetite for another early round of violence against Israel.¹² In 2008, General Gadi Eisenkot, then CO IDF Northern Command, announced that in future wars the IDF would reapply, with even greater force, the so-called “*Dahiyya* doctrine,” named after the heavy destruction inflicted by Israel's air force on the Shiite quarter of Beirut during the Second Lebanon War two years earlier.¹³

Such re-affirmations of deterrence have not gone unchallenged, however. Some security experts doubt the feasibility of achieving effective deterrence for extended periods of time vis-à-vis non-state actors enjoying the advantages of hybridity, the ability to disappear and hide, anonymity and an extremist ideology.¹⁴ Moreover, the “*Dahiyya* doctrine” has been criticized by human rights activists on the grounds that Israel possesses no clear strategy other than inflicting as many Palestinian and Lebanese casualties as possible – whether armed and unarmed – and the willful destruction of entire neighborhoods in Gaza and Beirut.¹⁵ Nonetheless, the weight of evidence shows Israel's general deterrence has remained both strong and credible. In the years since the 2014 Gaza War, the *Hamas* leadership has refrained from launching a significant number of rockets and missiles against Israeli targets, and has sought to dissuade other smaller factions from violating the ceasefire with Israel.

- *Intelligence*

It will be recalled that in the traditional security model early warning was supposed to enable the timely mobilization of reserve forces. The current dominance of firepower and the emergence of the concept of a “small but smart” military (on which more below) have undermined that role. Since a surprise attack can now be launched – or responded to – within a matter of minutes, Israel's dependence on intelligence for early warning has been reduced. On the other hand, target acquisition intelligence has become dominant, resulting in the IDF preparing a menu of targets for attack in the next war.

A further impetus for change in this area is prompted by the speed of developments in information technology. Following in the footsteps of the American army, the IDF has become a convert to the belief in network-centric capabilities, and in the mid-1990s the IDF launched its own version of network-centric warfare.¹⁶ The intention was to translate information superiority into increased shared awareness, speed of command, operational tempo, lethality, survivability and synchronization. These ideas were encapsulated in John Boyd's “Observation–Orientation–Decision–Action loop,” in accordance with which “the opponent must be observed to gather information; the attacker must orient himself to the situation or context; then decide and act accordingly.”¹⁷

During the Second Lebanon War, however, the assumption that accurate intelligence would be readily available proved to be exaggerated. Due to gaps in intelligence, outdated intelligence or failure to distribute intelligence to the troops on the battlefield in real time, or near real time, IDF

troops often operated blindly and were surprised on several occasions by an inferior enemy,¹⁸ raising doubts as to the expected cost-effectiveness of network-centric warfare.¹⁹

- *Battlefield decision*

The third pillar of the traditional Israel security doctrine, battlefield decision, is also reiterated in the *IDF's Strategy*. Moreover, in September 2017 the IDF publicized a large-scale exercise for war against *Hizbullah*, clearly signaling it might no longer restrict itself to deterrence operations against that enemy.²⁰ Since the early 2000s, however, several politicians and senior commanders have – at various stages of their careers – expressed skepticism as to (a) the relevance and (b) the feasibility of battlefield decision.²¹ Others have gone even further, referring to battlefield decision in what can only be termed a “postmodern sense.” Underestimating the necessary physical aspect of battlefield decision, they instead stress notions such as “decision image,” “decision picture,” “decision appearance” or “decision display.”²²

Notwithstanding criticism of this attitude in the wake of the Second Lebanon War, it persists. Thus, General Guy Tzur, ex-Commander of the IDF's ground forces, termed battlefield decision an elusive concept, especially against a non-state enemy.²³ Only a few months after the 2014 Gaza War, then Chief-of-Staff Major-General Benny Gantz said that “achieving battlefield decision and deterrence in asymmetric war is still a problem.”²⁴

This skepticism feeds on several factors, some already mentioned, one being restrictions on the use of force stemming from judicial and moral constraints and casualty aversion. The other, a postmodern preference for the nonphysical components of battlefield decision, especially in view of the doubts raised as to its relevance in LIC or cyber-war contexts. The influence of these two considerations is strengthened by the growing relevance of grand-strategic decision (i.e., denying the enemy the ability to fight not by direct contact on the battlefield but by attacking his civilian rear), and the transformation of warfare into a rocket or missile exchange over the heads of the ground forces.

Question marks

Incorporated under this heading are three or four prospective additions compatible with the new Israeli security doctrine.

Defense as a fourth pillar

Of late, Israeli security experts have proposed defense be added as a fourth pillar to the traditional triad of the security model.²⁵ This addition is considered justified principally by reference to the Israeli public's insistence on being protected from rocket and missile threats by multi-layer shields of anti-rocket and anti-missile systems, passive as well as active.

The problem with such systems is that, impressive though they are, they cannot constitute an effective deterrent. At best, they can only frustrate the enemy. Furthermore, emphasizing defense erodes the commitment to offense and signals readiness to absorb enemy attacks. It has also been questioned whether the systems are capable of intercepting all incoming enemy missiles and rockets simultaneously – a query to which their proponents respond with the argument that defensive measures are supposed to serve as only a first phase of combat, to be followed by

offensive measures at later stages.

Post-heroic warfare

As a possible means of resolving the tension between attaining security and preserving civil liberties, the notion of post-heroic warfare has continued to evolve. Researchers ascribe its roots to demographic, social and moral circumstances. That may explain why post-heroic warfare is characteristically adopted by Western democracies involved in non-existential wars, where readiness to sacrifice is relatively low.²⁶

Briefly summarized, post-heroic warfare adheres to two main rules. First: avoid casualties to your own troops; second, avoid killing enemy civilians. Israel's enemies have never abided by these rules. On the contrary, they have deliberately targeted rockets at populated areas in Israel, with the intention of causing casualties that would demoralize the Israeli rear. The IDF, by contrast, has for some time evinced a commitment to a post-heroic policy which it began implementing as early as the late 1970s, meaning well before Luttwak's formulation.

In recent years, the most obvious illustrations of Israel's conduct of post-heroic operations have been "targeted killings," the term used to describe the selective execution of terror activists – persons who, in the words of Avi Dichter, a former head of Israel's General Security Services (GSS), "cannot be eliminated any other way [...] without a serious risk to our personnel."²⁷

Targeted killings have various functions, ranging from prevention to preemption, punishment, revenge and retribution.²⁸ They are carried out in several ways, such as firing missiles from attack helicopters or drones, gunning down activists in the streets, blowing up activists' cars, using long-range sniper bullets, etc. Sometimes, the intended victims are terrorists known to be about to launch an attack (referred to as "ticking bombs"); sometimes they are the political or military leaders of terrorist organizations, the individuals who supply their followers with ideological or political guidance, who plan terrorist attacks and who dispatch others to carry them out.

During the second *Intifada*, Israel conducted targeted killings in a far more systematic, continuous, large-scale and overt manner than any other country in the world. In acknowledging the adoption of a purposive targeted killing policy on January 9, 2001, then Chief-of-Staff Shaul Mofaz cited the legal opinion of the Military Advocate General, Brigadier-General Menachem Finkelstein, who determined that: "the IDF has the legal right to fight hostile elements in the Territories in exceptional and extraordinary cases, when the purpose is to save lives and in the absence of any other alternative."²⁹ Just over a month later, after nine Israelis had been murdered when a Palestinian terrorist drove a bus into a queue of people, Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh was even more explicit. Speaking for the entire Israeli government, he promised "we will continue our policy of liquidating those who plan or carry out attacks, and no one can give us lessons in morality because we have unfortunately 100 years [experience] of fighting terrorism."³⁰

By the end of 2001, Israel's armed forces were reportedly given a freer hand to carry out targeted killings of Palestinian activists.³¹ Moreover, instead of restricting such attacks to "ticking bombs," they were also targeting "ticking infrastructure." As such, they became a preventive rather than preemptive measure and applied on a routine, some would say wholesale, basis.³² Certainly, the procedures adopted became more standardized. The GSS was to have the final word regarding target selection, with the senior military and political echelon approving its

recommendation almost automatically, to the point of almost giving up any discretion regarding the chosen targets and timing of the strikes.³³

Israeli targeted killings are discussed in several scholarly studies.³⁴ Most of these works defend targeted killing on moral grounds, albeit without concealing their skepticism concerning its effectiveness as a tool of counter-terrorism. Other works refer to Israeli targeted killing in the framework of a more general discussion of Israel's anti-terror activities,³⁵ or in terms of the pros and cons for the US in targeted killing based on the Israeli experience.³⁶

Reservations regarding Israeli targeted killing policy have been expressed not only by scholars but also by Israeli practitioners. One such critic was former Chief of IDF Military Intelligence, General Amos Malka, who reported that targeted killings were often carried out on the basis of opportunity rather than necessity, and were sometimes motivated by emotion rather than cold reason.³⁷ Other detractors ranged from Israeli politicians (e.g., former Ministers of Justice Yossi Beilin and Dan Meridor), to human rights organizations and activists in Israel and abroad (e.g., *B'Tselem*,³⁸ or Amnesty International³⁹), and from European politicians and journalists⁴⁰ to Arab politicians and scholars.⁴¹

The principal arguments advanced by these sources against targeted killings are that Israel was using them as a method of carrying out executions without trial. That they endangered civilians, who could be inadvertently killed should they happen to be in the vicinity of a targeted killing; and that such actions were likely to provoke retaliatory acts of revenge which, because they resulted in the deaths of additional civilians, would impede further efforts to attain peace. In response, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2004 posted on its internet site a detailed discussion of the legal aspects of Israeli targeted killing policy, stressing its exceptional and defensive nature.⁴²

A balance sheet is difficult to draw up. Unlike the elimination of military leaders during the second *Intifada*, which often proved to be ineffective, it seems that the decapitation of *Hamas*'s political and spiritual leaders in 2004 did account for the organization's decision to suspend hostilities against Israel. However, no direct causal relationship can be ascertained between Israeli targeted killing policy and *Hamas*' decision to end the second *Intifada*. Quite independently of targeted killings, that decline might have been affected by other developments: Operation Defensive Shield in mid-2002, during which Israel regained control over the West Bank; the construction of the security fence in the West Bank since late 2003; and Arafat's death in November 2004.

Strategy of attrition vs. Blitzkrieg

Attrition is, to a great extent, the opposite of *Blitzkrieg*.⁴³ *Blitzkrieg* aims at large-scale achievements within an extremely short period, whereas attrition exploits the duration of the war to bring about a gradual exhaustion of the enemy's physical and moral resistance.⁴⁴ Notwithstanding the image of *Blitzkrieg* as a highly sophisticated and modern mode of operation, attrition too focuses on the adversary's will power and morale, rather than his capabilities. If anything, attrition might be the more modern of the two, since *Blitzkrieg* restricts itself to the military levels of war, while attrition shifts from the battlefield to economic, psychological and other spheres, often becoming a confrontation at the grand-strategic level. It is also worth remembering that although attrition as a strategy typically seems tailor-made to suit the limitations of the side that is militarily and technologically weaker, stronger sides have also used

it from time to time.

Integral to the traditional Israeli security model was the IDF's commitment to *Blitzkrieg*, the main reason being the country's and society's perceived incapacity to sustain prolonged wars. The first architects of Israeli security and military doctrines believed the national threshold of tolerance for the price involved in wars of attrition – in terms of both casualties and damage to the economy resulting from prolonged conscription – was clearly much lower than that of its enemies. *Blitzkrieg*, on the other hand, would (so it was believed) enable the country to return to regular day-to-day life as quickly as possible and to minimize both military and civilian casualties. Furthermore, as mentioned above, this was also seen as a way of diminishing the likelihood of superpower intervention, and also of preempting the arrival of Arab expeditionary forces onto the battlefield to fight alongside the direct confrontation states.⁴⁵

A significant shift in Israeli attitudes toward attrition occurred in the late 1980s, after the outbreak of the first *Intifada*. When that uprising erupted, in December 1987, Israeli political and military decision-makers were taken by surprise.⁴⁶ Not only had they underestimated the unrest in the Territories,⁴⁷ they also did not know how to cope with civil disobedience applied against them by the local Palestinian leadership. As the scope of the unrest exceeded that of previous incidents, Defense Minister Yitzhak Rabin instructed Israeli troops to react decisively, most notoriously by granting them authorization “to break arms and legs” of civilian demonstrators, if necessary,⁴⁸ as if that would put an end to the struggle and force the Palestinian leadership to stop hostilities.

In issuing those directives, Rabin, a former Chief of Staff, was clearly influenced by his personal experience of HICs. He basically rejected the idea of attrition and was instead committed to a quick and effective military confrontation that would result in a victory that could ultimately be translated into political gains. However, four months after the outbreak of the *Intifada* Rabin himself realized that Israel's military advantage was all but irrelevant when it came to coping with extremely limited violence or civil disobedience. Israel's status as the source of power and authority in the Territories dictated that its conduct there be restricted: morally, legally and politically. He also concluded that only through a cumulative process of physical and economic exhaustion⁴⁹ could this new challenge be met. And that the solution to the underlying causes of the uprising was political.⁵⁰ This realization constituted a watershed in Israeli security thinking.

During the 1990s, IDF's Central Command tested a new attrition-oriented LIC doctrine in the Territories,⁵¹ the contents of which were later applied during the second *Intifada*. Unlike Chief of Staff Mofaz, who sought for a definitive outcome, Prime Minister Sharon and Chief of Staff Ya'alon believed the *Intifada* would be defeated in an ongoing effort stretching over years or perhaps even decades. When asked why he was not striving for a decisive conclusion as quickly as possible – the results that he had sought earlier when a military commander – Sharon explained that as Prime Minister he had to see the entire picture, not merely its narrow military component. One must also assess how things might develop in the future, which requires a gradualist approach.⁵² As for Ya'alon, he talked about a War of Attrition won by scoring points as opposed to a knockout.⁵³ Illustrative of the new approach is the name given by Israeli troops to the second *Intifada* – “The Six-Year War,” as opposed to the “[1967] Six-Day War.”⁵⁴

Early in 2004 it was claimed that a paper issued by the Training and Doctrine Department and the IDF had renewed the Israeli military's commitment to achieving a quick, decisive battlefield outcome and to avoiding attrition, while at the same time acknowledging the need to prepare for

prolonged confrontations.⁵⁵ This concession to reality and to the limits of the possible for Israel is of great significance, for it documents a realization that LICs and wars of attrition are winnable by demonstrating both destructive power and cost tolerance. Nowadays the stronger adversary can also demonstrate staying power as one of the benefits of post-heroic warfare, thus enjoying two-fold superiority, as Israel proved in the first and second *Intifadas*.

Postscript: Is a “small but smart military” what the IDF really needs?

In recent decades Israel has adopted a force design based on a combination of airpower and Special Forces, a design designated a “small but smart” military. The concept was coined by Chief of Staff Dan Shomron in the late 1980s and adopted by subsequent chiefs of staffs, including Ehud Barak, Moshe Ya’alon and Benny Gantz. Its adoption reflected the greater effectiveness of weapon systems but also their inflated cost, combined with the need to decrease the number of weapon systems and troops on the battlefield in order to reduce their vulnerability.

Small but smart militaries, however, may be insufficient to ensure success in LICs. Since the mid-1990s, American military analysts have submitted history-based theories regarding troop density in “stability operations,” which fall under the category of LICs. Most of their density recommendations have fallen within a range of 20–25 soldiers per 1,000 residents in an area of operations.⁵⁶ This has been acknowledged by the US Army’s counterinsurgency field manual that advocates a minimum ratio of 20 troops per 1,000 local residents.⁵⁷

The IDF seems to have ignored these recommendations. It has stuck to the belief that a small number of troops using high-tech equipment would suffice to neutralize rocket launchers used by insurgents against populated areas, to destroy even a sophisticated guerrilla force while capturing terrain from which guerrilla warfare is conducted and thereby achieve decisions on the battlefield.

The implications for the IDF’s reserve system are clear. After having relied on reserves for a long period of time (in the past the reserves comprised some 75% of the IDF’s ground forces), in recent decades the IDF’s reserves units have shrunk significantly.⁵⁸ This was demonstrated in the 2006 Second Lebanon War, during which – as a direct result of years of insufficient investment in the reserve system – the IDF suffered from a shortage of ground troops. Prior to the outbreak of the war IDF strategists failed to appreciate that a significant number of reserve units would be needed in LICs, too. “Conventional war is no longer our top priority,” explained the chief of the IDF’s reserve forces two months before the outbreak of fighting.⁵⁹ Based on this premise, the army phased out some reserve units, reduced the number of reservists activated, cut annual terms of reserve duty from 30 days to 14, activated reserve units only for training (not combat or guard duty) and lowered the maximum age for reservists from 46 to 40. In the 2006 war, the IDF paid dearly for these cutbacks.

Conclusion

Israel’s current security model lacks the inner logic, coherence and clarity of its predecessor. Reflective of such weakness is the publication “The IDF’s Strategy.” The uniqueness of this document is two-fold: first, it is open to the public, which means that it cannot cover all relevant

aspects of Israel's security, particularly those that are classified. Second, its unprecedented scope has come at the expense of its focus and has created the impression of an eclectic security model that falls victim to a syndrome known as "grasp all, lose all."

Given the basic changes that have taken place in Israel's internal and external environment in recent decades, reverting to the traditional model is no longer a viable option. Rather, it seems that what is needed is a formulation of a concise set of guiding principles derived from three sources: first, a history-based theory in the field of security and military studies that will equip the security elite and military commanders with the universal knowledge required to strengthen their professionalism. Hitherto, that background has been in very short supply. A second requirement is for an itemization of the basic values that define what Israel is fighting for, and what is and what is not morally and judicially acceptable during military operations. Third, there is a need for an authoritative overview of the country's fundamental strategic environment, e.g., its geo-strategic position, the asymmetric and symmetric wars it is engaged in, its alliance system.

Absent these three elements, Israel's present security doctrine will continue to be somewhat indeterminate.

Notes

- 1 For the full text of the document and an analysis of its political, strategic, military and societal aspects, see Meir Elran, Gabi Siboni and Kobi Michael (eds.), *The IDF's Strategy in the Perspective of Israel's National Security* (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: INSS, 2015.
- 2 Frank G. Hoffman, "Complex Irregular Warfare: The Next Revolution in Military Affairs," *Orbis* 50 (Summer 2006): 395–411; Jeffrey B. White, "Some Thoughts on Irregular Warfare." www.cia.gov/csi/studies/96unclass/iregular.htm; James N. Mattis and Frank Hoffman, "Future Warfare: The Rise in Hybrid Wars," *Proceedings* 131 (November 2005): 18–19; Frank Hoffman, "Lessons From Lebanon: Hezbollah and Hybrid Wars," *The Evening Bulletin*, September 5, 2006. www.theeveningbulletin.com/site/news.cfm?newsid=17152236&BRD=2737&PAG=461&dept_id=574088&rfti=6.
- 3 Eric V. Larson, *Casualties and Consensus*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1996, p. 49.
- 4 Rupert Smith, *The Utility of Force*. New York: Vintage, 2008; Hugh Smith, "What Costs Will Democracies Bear? A Review of Popular Theories of Casualty Aversion," *Armed Forces & Society* 31 (2005): 487–512.
- 5 Ari Shavit, "Interview With IDF Chief-of-Staff Moshe Ya'alon." www.imra.org.il/story.php3?id=13425.
- 6 Yagil Levy, *Israel's Death Hierarchy: Casualty Aversion in a Militarized Democracy*. New York: New York University Press, 2012, p. 69; Sima Kadmon, "I Was Wrong" (Hebrew), *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, February 15, 2008.
- 7 Yossi Yehoshua, "Declining Values" (Hebrew), *Yediot Aharonot Weekend Supplement*, July 13, 2007.
- 8 "Testimony by CoS Dan Halutz Before the Winograd Commission" (Hebrew). www.vaadatwino.org.il/pdf/מליל%20הדו%20לחלוצ%20הדו%20לחלוצ.pdf, chapter 14, pp. 29 and 31.
- 9 See Steven Metz, *Armed Conflict in the 21st Century: The Information Revolution and Post-Modern Warfare*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, April 2000, pp. 31–3. The goals set out for the US military forces a decade into the twenty-first century by former Secretary of Defense Cohen and former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Shalikashvili were that they possess "dominant battlefield knowledge," "full dimensional protection," "dominant maneuver" and "precision strike" ability from long distances. Michael O' Hanlon, *Technological Change and the Future of War*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2000. See also Gordon R. Sullivan and James M. Dubik, "War in the Information Age," *Military Review* 74 (1994): 55–56.
- 10 See, for example, Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004; Stephen Biddle, "Military Power: A Reply," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 28 (2005): 453–469.
- 11 General Dan Har'el (then CO IDF Operations Division), "The Change in Israel's Security" (Hebrew), *Lecture at the Interdisciplinary College*, Herzliya, Israel, March 17, 2003.
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Security, technology and cyber warfare

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The principal foundations of Israel's national security doctrine were laid down in the very course of its War of Independence, and for several years thereafter, by David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. Ben-Gurion committed to writing his thoughts on security in a 46-page memorandum presented to the Government on October 18, 1953, a document that has since attained virtually canonical status.²

Ben-Gurion's memorandum begins with an evaluation of the threats facing Israel and an analysis of the basic factors differentiating Israel from Arab countries, and concludes: "Because we are quantitatively inferior – we must be superior in quality." The remainder of his memorandum is devoted to demonstrating how this axiom might be implemented, and thus reflects Ben-Gurion's perceptions not only of strictly military matters but of all possible factors contributing to national security. Many of these he had already enumerated in a speech delivered at the conclusion of an IDF (Israel Defense Forces) officers' course as early as May 1949. "The security of the State of Israel," he then announced, "is not to be established by its army alone." Besides immigration, land settlement, industrial power and foreign policy, he also specified the importance of scientific research and of technology. Thus:

Scientific research is required not only for the needs of security; all of our economic and cultural activity cannot be described without maximal, comprehensive utilization of science and technology. The development of Israel, the advancement of its agriculture, industry, overseas trade, education and the restoration of the nation – all entail the fostering of science to the limits of our mental and material capabilities. The same applies to security needs. In order to remain alert in the future, Israel must utilize the best scientific powers the Jewish people has to offer. We must enable our youth to develop their scientific talents, so that they can devote their whole lives to scientific study and research, furnishing them with the most sophisticated laboratories in all fields of physical and biological research, and adapt their activities for the country's security needs and development.³

Quality in general and technological and scientific excellence in particular have thus always been recognized as central factors in the power equation between Israel and its neighbors. That is why the State of Israel has over the years invested significantly in promoting scientific research and defense technology. Ever since its establishment, the IDF has striven to base its power on

advanced, top-of-the range armaments and on unique technological solutions to operational challenges. To that end, considerable emphasis is placed (inordinately for a state of Israel's size and financial resources) on building up the power of its qualitative technological arms, such as the Air Force and the Intelligence Corps.

This chapter examines the role Ben-Gurion's quality principle continues to play in Israel's defense doctrine. In so doing, it also emphasizes the dynamic dimension of this phenomenon. Technology has experienced massive changes in the seven decades since Israel's establishment and the initial formulation of its security doctrine. Quality, therefore, has assumed various forms, and, as the conclusion of this chapter demonstrates, modern cyber warfare constitutes its most relevant contemporary expression.

The importance of technological superiority

The distinction between quality and quantity was not of course original to Ben-Gurion. Almost two hundred years earlier it had been articulated by the great Prussian military theorist von Clausewitz, who is in his classic work *Vom Krieg* ("On War," first published in 1832) enlarged on the differences between factors that are qualitative (fighting spirit, military ingenuity, willpower, etc.) and quantitative.⁴ In his view, the former, notwithstanding their decisive importance for the results of military engagements, are not quantifiable and have limits that cannot be exceeded. In contrast, quantitative factors are measurable, relatively easy to control and almost limitless: quantities can be increased incrementally – so much so that they can eventually overwhelm qualitative factors.

However, absent from Clausewitz's analysis was a discussion of the part played in modern warfare by the quality of weapons systems. Their decisive importance had already been demonstrated when, thanks to the overwhelming psychological power of firearms, Francisco Pizarro González (1475–1541) defeated the mighty Incan kingdom (population approximately 20 million) with a force of only 180 soldiers and 37 horses. Events in the mid-twentieth century were to provide another dramatic example in 1945 when the Japanese did not surrender to the numerical superiority of the United States army and only agreed to a ceasefire after two atomic bombs were dropped on their cities. From Israel's perspective, these instances are encouraging. They suggest that the country's qualitative advantages (in terms of personnel, science and technology, modern weapons systems, etc.) can compensate for its quantitative deficiencies.

In this context, technological superiority has a vital role to play. Quite apart from being decisive in and of itself, it can also result in the attainment of strategic surprise – altogether a cardinal asset in military encounters. This, too, was a development not recognized by Clausewitz, who in general limited the advantages accruing from surprise, subterfuge and deception to the level of tactics. At the strategic level, he concluded, "only rarely does surprise gain impressive success."⁵ That assessment, too, reflected Clausewitz's view that the only point of deception and surprise was to facilitate the concentration of forces in preparation for the decisive battle, the outcome of which would be determined by quantitative factors. However, a different conclusion can be drawn, once it is appreciated that adversaries can be surprised not just by unforeseen maneuvers but also – and perhaps even more – by the appearance on the battlefield of an unexpected weapons system,⁶ and even by the use of familiar weapons systems in unexpected ways. In both variants, technological deception employed as a form of subterfuge, in the modern era, can produce decisive results.⁷

The relativity theory of force construction

A recognition of the importance of qualitative factors leads to an important conclusion. When planning for war against its Arab adversaries, Israel must seek to ensure that combat takes place in those areas best allowing it to demonstrate technological and scientific advantages and the superior educational quality of its personnel.⁸ From Israel's perspective, the preferred scenario is a "hi-tech" war, characterized for instance by air and naval engagements, and in ground combat by dynamic battles in which Israeli forces can exploit their superiority in fire accuracy and in the ability to move large forces synchronously. Conversely, Israel is at a disadvantage in static wars of attrition (such as trench warfare), and even more so once conflict deescalates into a confrontation between large numbers of adversaries deploying low-level technology – a scenario typified by the first (1987) and second (2001) *Intifadas*.

Fortunately for Israel, at the beginning of the twenty-first century there exists a precise correlation between Israel's relative advantages and the most effective ways to produce power, from both an economic and military viewpoint. As a result, Israel need not submit to the conventional logic that might require it to "bridge the gaps" between its own forces and those of its adversaries. Rather, it can foster its relative advantages and – as the region's dominant military power – seize the initiative in influencing the form of wars in which it will be engaged in the future. In so doing, it can dictate both the pace and structure of the agendas for force construction drawn up by its neighbors and exploit the relative advantages offered to it by adopting the strategy of the indirect as opposed to the direct approach.

The forgoing analysis can be summarized in a discrete case of the broader quality principle – what I have elsewhere termed the "technology principle"⁹ – consisting of the following components:

- 1 The basic imperative of technology, whereby technology is to be used in every possible way to save lives and reduce casualties;
- 2 The more technological the war becomes, the greater Israel's relative advantage.

These principles arise from Israel's relative advantage in the quality of its human resources, and therefore should be complemented by the following axiom:

- 3 Fostering technology means investing, first and foremost, in the human factor (education, scientific and technological training).

The combination of advanced technology and high-quality personnel is synergistic.

The civil–military technological interface

One of Israel's greatest advantages is the twin nature of its infrastructure of advanced technological knowledge. In addition to being based on first-class research institutes and universities, it also draws on the IDF's extensive combat experience. This ability to apply combat experience to technological development grants Israel a clear advantage even over greater powers like the United States, France and the United Kingdom. In large part, it derives from Israel's military system, consisting of compulsory service followed by a longer period of reserve duty, a system that altogether tends to blur the border between industry (or research

institutes) and the military. As a result, industrial project managers are often reserve officers with first-hand practical, hands-on knowledge in their field of specialization.

Like the combination of advanced technology and high-quality personnel, the relationship between the military and economy is also synergistic. Research and development, mainly in the defense field, plays a key role in reinforcing Israel's economy and suiting it to the modern era, especially in the domain of information technology. Even a superficial survey of hundreds of technological initiatives (start-ups) in Israel indicates the vast majority are headed by graduates of technologically oriented IDF and defense system units. Moreover, they are often based on an information infrastructure originally funded within the framework of defense research and development.

The crucial nature of the increasing emphasis on investment in research and development – some 80% of which is devoted to training personnel – cannot be emphasized enough. Authoritative published models relate to this investment as an endogenous variable (i.e., a factor internally determined by the model, rather than being added externally) in the economic equation. Besides facilitating the emergence of new products, it also directly impacts on short-term employment rates. For both reasons, in 1990 American economist Paul Romer, for example, posited that returns from government investment in R&D were greater than those produced by investment in classical manufacturing factors such as workforce and capital.¹⁰ Similarly, a study conducted by the Bank of Israel almost a decade later reached the same conclusions, finding that over a period lasting 35 years, investment in research and development had produced a return of 30 percent, roughly double that produced by investment in infrastructure capital.¹¹

Against this background, three phenomena help to explain how and why Israel has gained a relative technological advantage, thereby balancing out the power equation with its neighbors.

First: Israel leads the global list of R&D expenditures relative to its GDP (more than 4% per annum for the last 20 years).

Second: Israel is advantaged relative to most countries in the world in technological personnel ratios: the ratio of engineers in Israel's population, for instance, is almost double that of the next country listed, the United States. The same applies to the number of scientists and percentage of graduates with advanced degrees in the workforce.¹²

Third: Israel has exploited dual-use products of technology for civil as well as military purposes. Over the last 30 years, certain technological fields in the civil/commercial sector owe much of their development to past investments in defense research and development to the point that today they are self-supporting. This is especially true of computer and communication technologies. Satellite reconnaissance constitutes another example: having originated as a classified military technology, it has today become a highly accessible and available commodity.

In summary, investments in dual technologies serve two purposes. Quite apart from directly buttressing Israel's security, they also reinforce the economy. By training technologically adept personnel, they contribute to higher employment levels, increased exports, attracting foreign investment and developing unique information sources.

From information to cyber warfare

The end of the twentieth century witnessed an outburst of renewed thinking and critical examination of foundational principles in many fields, including military thought. American

military thinking especially reflected that process, incorporating lessons learned from the 1991 Gulf War and impressions made by the rapid pace of technological change, particularly in information and communications technologies (ICT).

Under the impact of those two stimulants and at the instigation of Andrew Marshall, former head of the Office of Net Assessment [ONA] in the US Department of Defense, there emerged in the 1990s a new air–land combat doctrine,¹³ a doctrine based on the proposition that the key to battlefield success lies in combining airpower (intended to destroy battlefield targets by fire) with maneuver by the ground force. Designed to integrate contemporary technological innovations with modern weaponry in an overall doctrine and theory, the new concept came to be termed nothing less than a “Revolution in Military Affairs” (RMA).

Third wave wars

In conceptual outline, the idea of an RMA had been anticipated by Alvin and Heidi Toffler, who in a series of books published early in the 1990s had laid out the prospect of what they called “third wave wars.”¹⁴ Their basic idea is that human history divides into three eras (waves) – agricultural, industrial and informational. Although these eras occasionally overlap, each is distinctive in its economy, its ways of generating wealth, its culture and, not least, its ways of waging warfare.

During the agricultural wave, for example, wealth derived from land ownership. The transition to the second (“industrial”) wave commenced with the industrial revolution of the late eighteenth century (itself a product of the revolution in art and culture signified by the Renaissance and the scientific revolution derived from Newtonian thought). The economy of this era rested on mass production, so that wealth shifted to the industrialists. According to the Tofflers, we are now experiencing the transition to the third era, in which the economy is based on knowledge and control of information. Hence, if the hoe symbolized the first wave and industrial production lines the second, that of the third “wave” is the computer.

In essence, the Tofflers reiterated an insight published much earlier by the philosopher Karl Popper. Knowledge, Popper taught, is intrinsically distinct from both land and raw materials intended for industrial production. Unlike matter, information can be reused time and again, and distributed to numerous consumers without diminishing in quantity.¹⁵ As Paul Romer emphasized, this observation has enormous implications for economic theory: since the quantity of knowledge is not depleted if some of it is sold, it constitutes an inexhaustible “commodity.”¹⁶

The Tofflers’ contribution lies in applying these concepts to warfare, the history of which, they argued, also divides into three similar “waves,” each of which (like the human economy) is distinguished by a unique form. Put in graphic terms, swords constituted the primary military symbols of the first wave; aircraft and tanks (machines) those of the second wave; and military computers (or reconnaissance satellites) those of “third wave wars.”

The distinctions between these evolutionary stages of warfare run far deeper than differences in the weapons employed. More crucial are the power bases on which their conduct depends. Second wave wars – exemplified by most of Israel’s wars as well as by World Wars I and II – are built around mass armies, with most campaigns conducted by machines (platforms, such as tanks, aircraft and naval vessels) manufactured on industrial mass production lines. In this form of warfare, victory goes to the side that proves capable – both economically and technologically – of simply manufacturing more machines more quickly and at less cost than its adversaries.

(From this perspective, the USA's victory over Germany in WWII was determined by its vastly superior production of aircraft and tanks).

According to the Tofflers – and, in their wake, the American RMA disciples – warfare will be completely different in the future. Whereas first wave wars were based on human muscle power, and second wave wars on the power of machines, third wave wars will become increasingly based on information power. Although the role of materiel and mental capabilities are not to be devalued in future wars, the name of the game will be acquiring the necessary information about our own forces and about the enemy while depriving the enemy easy access to the information it requires. In other words, wars are expected to be won by those who attain mastery over information technologies, even when they confront a preponderance of weapons systems manufactured by second wave production lines.

It is important at this point to remark that while the term “information technology” denotes automated information and management systems (embedded systems), it does not refer solely to computers. Rather, the appellation includes information-gathering technologies (satellites, various sensors, and so on), transferring raw data (communications), processing and filtering, disseminating processed data and, concurrently, technologies for preventing access to one's own data by unauthorized parties (by using such operating methods as camouflage, mock-ups, screening, deception and misleading, disruption and blocking).

At root, however, it is the massive reliance on computers that best characterizes modern weapons systems: computer technology that is required to overcome the demands that information technologies place on command, control and intelligence networks. Therein, of course, lies a potential danger, because computer systems are not only an essential support tool for modern warfare, but also an enticing target for potential foes.

This was recognized as early as the late 1990s in the United States Army's main combat doctrine manual, FM 100–6, which pointed out:

Instead of being limited to the physical destruction of combat personnel or materiel as the single route leading to battlefield success, armies can now turn the enemy's information systems into targets, to change the battlefield chemistry and lead to success in war.¹⁷

The targeting possibilities thus envisaged can be extended much further.

After all, not only military systems are computer-integrated. Many systems in the civil economy are also increasingly dependent on computers (such as telephone and communication exchanges, bank systems and logistic information systems). This development opens new options for warfare and instantly raises questions concerning the concept of warfare itself. Is an attack on computers that store and process a country's economic data (e.g., those of banks) an act of war? Does the military bear responsibility for defending the Stock Exchange from computer attack? Would the collapse of bank computers warrant an armed response?

Even if the damage sustained may be solely economic and cause no direct loss of life, each of these scenarios clearly possesses military implications. In certain cases, economic damage can incapacitate an entire country. This problem is further complicated by the fact that the side intent on launching a computer attack need not require a specific territorial base to do so. Because computer warfare lacks a definable front line, and geographical distances are virtually meaningless, such attacks can be perpetrated not just by countries but also by non-state actors and organizations (including terrorist organizations or organized crime) and even by individuals.

Cyber warfare

Today, after experiencing the 2016 US presidential election, when the Russians allegedly influenced American voters by spreading false messages in cyberspace, there is no need to underline the importance of cyber warfare to national security. This term now encompasses a wide range of phenomena. The span includes hacking into government databases, stealing money by means of forged bank orders, theft of credit card numbers and extortion by locking down computer sites and releasing them for ransom, as well as the following: destroying computer sites and paralyzing and damaging power plants, transportation systems (including those of sea and air traffic) and sensitive facilities (such as the centrifuges at the Iranian enrichment facility in Natanz). Added to the list are conducting espionage between countries and commercial espionage (theft of trade secrets), as well as using the Internet and social media to instantly distribute messages intended to influence public opinion.

As a country in which the principle of technology (as described above) is at the basis of its security, Israel is one of the first in the world to have entered into the field of cyber warfare, and has done so in the following seven evolutionary stages.¹⁸

In the beginning, there was intelligence

The basic task of intelligence agencies is to gather information about entities that endanger security. To that end, they have always engaged in such activities as espionage, wiretapping and photography. Thanks to the rapid development of computer technology, they must now also penetrate the opponent's computers.

That possibility first materialized in the 1980s, when computer servers replaced mechanical telephone exchanges. In addition, computerized media have become the principal means for storing and handling information, so that even on a personal level we now keep our personal information, such as pictures, on a computer (or even in the "cloud") and no longer in physical folders like photo albums. While intelligence agencies sought to develop techniques allowing them to hack into computers, the defense of the information stored on those machines became the focus of a new discipline called data security.

Information warfare

Twentieth-century technology, especially technology related to computers and the computerized communications networks linking them, has dramatically augmented the role of real-time intelligence in warfare. Computers made it possible, for the first time, to pass on real-time information collected in one place to a combatant situated in a different location. However, the arrival of the era of automatic command and control systems meant that the systems on which they depended also became vital and vulnerable targets of attack.

By the beginning of the 1990s, computer systems had become sufficiently effective to be included in the new American RMA combat doctrine. Information Warfare (IW), as it was now termed, indeed became one of the four pillars of RMA (the other three being Precision Strike, Space and Dominant Maneuver). IW's intention was dual: to secure and protect our own data and, at the same time, to disrupt, distort and prevent the enemy's military forces from using the information it requires for combat.

Cyber weapons

The rapid miniaturization of computer chips¹⁹ made the computer small enough to be integrated into any combat platform. Navigation and bombing computers were then inserted into airplanes, ships and tanks, assuming some of a pilot's, navigator's or driver's tasks. Additional miniaturization led to introducing computers into the weapons themselves, thus opening the era of "smart arms" (i.e., those possessing an "artificial brain" in the form of a computer chip). This development led some armies (including the IDF), as early as the beginning of the 1990s, to examine the possibility of using cyber technology as an independent weapon that might supplement an existing conventional armory.

In order to neutralize an enemy's aircraft, for example, action need not be limited to kinetic damage (using anti-aircraft guns or missiles) or even to electronic warfare (designed to disrupt and jam the plane's electronic operations). An enemy's computerized weapons system could now also be infected with viruses of one kind or another. Strange as it may seem today, the responsibility for developing this field was usually entrusted to intelligence agencies, because back then only they possessed the skills and the knowledge needed to hack into computers.²⁰

From information security to cyber security

Designers of Israel's security doctrine soon realized that Israel's position as the most computerized country in the Middle East made it extremely vulnerable to cyberattacks – especially on its civilian systems. In 2002, accordingly, the Government decided to establish a new body – the National Information Security Authority (NISA) in the General Security Service. NISA's role was defined as supervision (in the cyber field) of critical national infrastructures, such as electricity production and supply, and water reservoirs and pipelines. As a result, Israel became the first country in the world to prepare itself for future cyber wars. In so doing, it also crossed an intellectual threshold: from data security to cyber security. This move reflected the realization that dependence of critical systems on computer control had increased to such an extent that disrupting the controllers could cause major physical damage to national infrastructures (not just interfering with sources of information).

From cyber security to national cyber security

The accumulated experience in cyber security by organizations included in the list of critical infrastructures (such as the Israel Electric Corporation) led to further development in Israel's increasingly sophisticated cyber thought. A single computer or server, or an organizational system of computers and servers, is almost impossible to "envelop" in a defense array by which it would be impermeable: totally isolated and protected from intrusion. As is true of any defense (even against a physical attack), the best and most effective mode of action is to take the initiative and thereby stop the attacker *en route* to his designated target, preferably while still at his own home base. Computer viruses do not infect the target computer directly. Rather, they are transmitted through the system's communication channels to other computers and can be inserted via a USB key or printer into the supply chain. Hence, in order to achieve effective security, one's entire communications array must be protected, which requires concerted action on a larger, national scale. As much became patently clear in 2010, with public exposure of the cyberattack leading to collapse of the centrifuges in Iran's uranium enrichment facilities. Since

then, there can be no doubt cyber threats to similar installations will increase.

This thinking provided the context in which I was appointed by the Prime Minister in 2010 to lead a multidisciplinary task force of some 80 experts in preparing Israel for future cyber threats. The team examined the subject from a very broad perspective and posed a general question: what steps were required to construct a living, breathing system, an eco-system, which would constantly monitor the development of technology and threats and automatically create solutions without requiring the guidance of a team of experts?

In 2011, I submitted a report to the Prime Minister that contained a series of recommendations on measures related not just to technology but also to the structure of the entire eco-system. This structure encompassed industry, academia and security entities; education in schools and creating academic centers of excellence; solving issues of export while establishing and protecting critical national infrastructures like supercomputers and simulators; regulation, etc. All these recommendations were incorporated in the 2011 decision establishing the National Cyber Bureau in the Prime Minister's Office. Importantly, the Bureau's mission was not to defend the nation against attacks, since that would remain the responsibility of the NISA, but rather to supervise, plan and orchestrate the establishment of an entire national eco-system.

Balancing security needs and privacy protection

The landmark 2011 decision left one problem unanswered: how to reconcile effective defense, which requires monitoring of communications systems and networks throughout the entire civilian sphere, with the protection of the citizen's personal privacy? The Prime Minister invited me to head another team to study this specific question, and our recommendations were adopted by the Government in January 2015.

In order to protect civilian cyberspace, Israel proceeded to establish a new National Cybersecurity Authority – a government arm neither subordinate to the intelligence services (including the General Security Service) nor part of the law enforcement system. Its mission statement was clearly defined: solely to remove malignant programs like malware and viruses from cyberspace, NOT to discover the perpetrators – again, an assignment remaining in the hands of the intelligence, security and police authorities. These reassurances to respect and guarantee personal privacy were made with the aim of securing the public's trust and cooperation, which are essential to the success of the task. After two years of operation, in January 2018, the Bureau and the Authority were merged into the National Cyber Directorate in the Prime Minister's Office.

From cyber security to cyber technology

What does the future hold? Computing technology does not standstill. We are close to making the next leap – to quantum computing technology – which will increase the performance of computers by a factor that is difficult to digest (times 10 to the power of 30). Nor is this the only anticipated development. The world of technology, as reflected in the literature, is busy planning smart houses, smart cities, smart factories, etc. The idea itself is rather simple: let us turn all the devices in our lives (refrigerator, car, washing machine, etc.) into a single integrated computer-controlled device, and connect all this in turn to a communication network dubbed the "Internet of Things."

Remote control of any object thus becomes possible. For example, by means of an order

transmitted via our smartphone we can turn on the water boiler in our home a few hours before we return from abroad, or air condition the house. Others have more far-reaching vision and speak of smart cities or even smart states. Moreover, accelerated development in the field of learning algorithms has returned artificial intelligence to center stage, integrating the latter into the general vision. Why should we any longer have to give an order on our phone to turn on the boiler when we get home from a long trip? Our diary is already on the phone, and with the addition of artificial intelligence, the phone itself will be able to send this message without human contact.

To be sure, all of these developments will require security measures. If we leave holes in our security, malevolent elements – which will always exist – can exploit them for purposes of terrorism and/or crime and cause irreversible devastation and damage.

The future therefore requires levels of security that will enable all of these innovations to come to fruition and to function smoothly, without major or extended disruption. We stand at the dawn of an era in which cyber security is no longer an end in itself (i.e., securing everything that is controlled by a computer). Instead, cyber security is actually an “enabler” technology, without which we cannot make future progress. For this reason, even the term “cyber security” already seems outdated. Better to replace it by the term “cyber technology.”

Conclusion

Very few countries have taken the steps necessitated by cyber security. Israel is certainly one of them, and was indeed one of the first to understand the deeper implications and fuller potential of Cyber Technology, because of heightened Israeli sensitivity to security threats and concomitant investment in qualitative advantages. As a result, today Israel is considered and respected as one of the five leading cyber powers in the world. For example, in 2017 it provided 5–10% of the global cyber market’s products and services. Even more impressively, also in 2017, Israel accounted for about 15% of all global business sector investments in cyber R&D.

The lessons for Israel and for future national security are as stark as they are straightforward. For one thing – and as originally envisaged by Ben-Gurion – Israel’s quantitative inferiority can only be overcome by continuing and continuous investment in breakthrough technologies. Secondly, however, where cyber developments are concerned, a kind of feedback loop is emerging. New technologies facilitate economic prosperity, which in turn enables further investments in sophisticated technologies that are yet further advanced. In other ways, too, a dual rationale has developed. Academia creates new knowledge. Industry relies on this knowledge and develops advanced capabilities with high value added, based on market needs and global demand. The IDF and national defense system benefit from the knowledge and capabilities created, and in turn contribute outstanding and experienced personnel, and unique needs and insights, which then feedback into academia and industry, and so on.

The overall security benefits cannot be exaggerated. Through the cyclical movement of knowledgeable, talented people from the defense system to industry and academia, an integrated system of connected entities is created – an eco-system – wherein knowledge is seamlessly transferred between the three systems: defense and government, industry and academia, which hopefully will stand Israel and its security imperative in good stead well into the future.

Notes

- 1 The author would like to thank the Blavatnik Interdisciplinary Cyber Research Centre (ICRC) at Tel Aviv University, for supporting this chapter.
- 2 A slightly abridged and edited version of the memorandum was made public almost 28 years later under the title “Army and State” (Hebrew) in the IDF Journal *Maarachot* 279–280 (May 1981): 2–11. On the continuing relevance of Ben-Gurion’s views, see: Yisrael Tal, *National Security: The Israeli Experience* (trans. Martin Kett from Hebrew). Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2000, and my *Israel’s Defense Doctrine* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Modan, 2013.
- 3 Printed in David Ben-Gurion, *Uniqueness and Purpose – On Israel’s Security* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Maarachot, 1971, p. 57.
- 4 See Yehoshafat Harkabi, “Power and Victory in the Wake of Quantity and Quality,” in: Zvi Ofer and Avi Kober (eds.) *Quality and Quantity in Military Buildup* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Maarachot, 1985, pp. 71–77.
- 5 Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 109.
- 6 One example is the strategic surprise attained by the Israeli Air Force in June 1967, when it attacked Arab airfields, thereby destroying the enemy’s aircraft on the ground. Arab use of AA missiles in the Yom Kippur War produced the same result.
- 7 Isaac Ben Israel, “To Seek Out Wisdom and Reckoning (Eccles.7:25),” in: Zvi Ofer and Avi Kober (eds.) *Quality and Quantity in Military Buildup* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Maarachot, 1985, pp. 51–52.
- 8 While in Israel, only 4% of the population is illiterate, in Syria, Egypt and Iraq the rates are, respectively, 36%, 39% and 42%.
- 9 Isaac Ben Israel, “Defense Theory and the Logic of Force Building (Hebrew),” *Maarachot* no. 354 (November 1997): 33–43.
- 10 Paul Romer, “Endogenous Technological Change,” *Journal of Political Economy* 86 (1990): S71–S102.
- 11 Arie Bergman and Arie Marom, “Productivity and Its Causes in Israeli Industry, 1960–1996” (Hebrew). Bank of Israel – Research Department, February 1998. <http://www.boi.org.il/he/Research/Pages/Papers-dp9803.aspx>
- 12 Besides reflecting massive investments in technology, these figures are also the result of the large influx of immigration from CIS countries since the early 1990s, which almost immediately increased by significant numbers the quantity of engineers and scientists in Israel.
- 13 According to some accounts, this concept also owed much to American studies of Israeli military operations in 1973. Isaac Ben Israel, “Technological Lessons” (Hebrew), *Maarachot* 332 (1993): 8–13, 80.
- 14 Alvin and Heidi Toffler, *War and Anti-War*. New York: Warner Books, 1993 and *Creating a New Civilization – The Politics of the Third Wave*. Atlanta, GA: Turner Publishing, 1995.
- 15 Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge – An Evolutionary Approach*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972, Chapter 3, pp. 106–152 and Chapter 4, pp. 153–190.
- 16 Romer, “Endogenous Technological Change.”
- 17 US Army, Field Manual No. 100-6, Information Operations. US Army Headquarters: Carlisle, PA, 1997.
- 18 For a more detailed description, see Lior Tabensky and Isaac Ben Israel, *Cyber Security in Israel*. Heidelberg: Springer, 2015.
- 19 Since the first use of a chip built from transistors in 1960, its dimensions became smaller at an exponential rate – so much so, that the number of transistors that can be put on a specific unit of area now doubles every 18 months (This development was predicted by Gordon Moore as early as 1965, and is known as Moore’s Law).
- 20 When, in the 1990s I proposed establishing the first IDF unit dealing with cyber weapons, only the intelligence agencies expressed sympathy for the idea.

Towards a Middle East regional security regime?

Martin Kramer

Regional security regimes come in different flavors. They usually emerge from recognition by a group of regional states that they stand to enhance their security by cooperating with one another, either to regulate their own conflicts or to ward off an extra-regional challenger. It is not necessarily the case that *only* regional states can sustain such a regime, with NATO a prime example. NATO is focused on protecting the security of democratic Europe, and even though it binds Europe to the United States in a transatlantic partnership, still there exists a high level of security coordination among the European members of NATO, who are also linked together in the machinery of the European Union.

The Middle East, by contrast, has no equivalent of NATO or the European Union. More than half a century after decolonization, it remains fragmented, with low levels of cooperation among its constituent parts and a high degree of dependence for security on external actors such as the United States and (increasingly) Russia.

This chronic fragmentation made possible the success of Zionism in transforming a small community into a powerful nation-state in less than a century. This is not to detract from the grit of Israel's founders, or the ingenuity of Israelis today. Their achievements in the security field are the stuff of legends. However, they always had the advantage of working against a weak and divided adversary. Zionists learned from experience that security came from a combination of reliance on outside Western powers and self-reliance for those instances when a supportive power might be preoccupied or unreliable. At no time did they regard the region itself as anything other than inhospitable and a source of *insecurity*.

To understand why Israel has put so little store in regional security, it is necessary to go back in history and examine the abortive attempts undertaken over time to include Israel, and before that the Jewish community in Palestine, in some sort of regional order. This survey will take us back to the earliest years of political Zionism, through the gestation and establishment of the state, via decades of war and peace treaties, up to the present day. The story is one of repeated failures, but a parallel story of repeated successes, as Israel reinforced its level of security through reliable sources beyond its immediate geopolitical environment.

Since the past does not predict the future, this chapter will end with a review of present prospects. At this moment, many observers do believe there has never been a better chance of creating a functioning regional security regime than today.

Pre-state attempts at regional security

When political Zionism first appeared on the world stage, Palestine had long been part of one of the world's most durable regional security regimes: the Ottoman Empire. Palestine had spent almost 400 years under Ottoman dominion, most of them as a minor province useful to the Ottoman state as a buffer blocking the eastward expansion of Christian or Western powers.

Theodor Herzl, founder of modern political Zionism, thought that a Jewish home in Palestine could be fostered through an agreement with the Ottoman sultan, who would grant a charter to the Zionists in return for economic and political support. This plan came to naught: the Ottoman Empire, by then weakened through military defeats and geographic contraction, had come to rely increasingly on the loyalty of its Muslim subjects, who would have regarded any such concession to Jewish Zionists as a betrayal of Islam.

Failure of overtures to the Sublime Porte left Herzl and the Zionist movement in limbo, awaiting the final dissolution of Ottoman power and the collapse of the regional order. "Some day I shall probably get the charter," wrote Herzl in his diary in 1902, "that is, provided we don't get it until after Turkey is divided, from the powers."¹ Herzl did not live long enough to witness that scenario, but he clearly anticipated it. To take root and thrive, Zionism would need the patronage and protection of extraneous Great Powers prepared to impose their will on the region from the outside. This was the guiding assumption of most Zionist diplomacy before the First World War. For this reason, he assiduously cultivated all of the European powers that might eventually claim Palestine as their share of the spoils. Zionism thus developed on two tracks, as a popular movement of Jewish self-reliance and as a political organization devoted to seeking an overarching shell of Western protection. The Zionists were thus led to prefer a region organized not from within, but from without.

The opening for implementing this strategy finally came as part of the denouement of the First World War, which brought about the demise of the Ottoman Empire and ended in Palestine's incorporation within the British Empire, nominally as a League of Nations mandate. The post-war regional security regime would be European, not Middle Eastern, and would rest upon British and French power. A group of Zionists in Britain, led by a Russian Jewish immigrant, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, had the foresight to imagine that the war might end just this way, and secured from Britain an advance promise to support the establishment of a "Jewish national home" in Palestine. It would indeed be under Britain's aegis and security umbrella that Zionism would achieve critical mass. In 1917, in all of Palestine there lived only 60,000 Jews, who comprised but a tenth of the overall population. Thirty years later, that number had increased tenfold, and Jews were a third of the population.

Throughout this interwar and Palestine mandate period sporadic efforts were made to accommodate Zionism within some local security framework, which the British hoped to construct, and which would have relieved Britain of both the expense and trouble of direct control. The first instance occurred in 1918–1919, when the British encouraged Weizmann to reach an understanding with their principal Arab protégé, the Emir Faisal, then leading the British-backed Arab Revolt against the Ottomans. Weizmann set out for the desert east of the Jordan River to meet with Faisal. A photograph of the two men standing together in June 1918, Weizmann dressed incongruously in Arab headdress (and a linen suit), would become the iconic representation of this earliest attempt at Jewish–Arab rapprochement. In Paris the following January, the two even signed an agreement of cooperation between the Zionist and Arab national movements.

Had Faisal been given the expansive Arab kingdom he thought the British had promised his family, and which Faisal imagined he would rule from Damascus, the agreement with Weizmann might have become operational. Under its terms, the Jewish community in Palestine would have enjoyed some measure of national independence, in partnership with a much larger Arab state or federation. The British and French ultimately refused, however, to open enough space for Faisal to realize his kingdom. Faisal “came to a complete understanding with us,” wrote Weizmann, “and would no doubt have carried this understanding into effect if his destiny had shaped as we at that time expected it would. Unfortunately ... he was unable to realize his ambitions.”² After the Faisal–Weizmann agreement fell into abeyance, Zionism continued to rely on Britain and its willingness to employ force in opposition to a growing Arab nationalist demand for independence, including in Palestine.

During the 1930s, Zionists and Arab nationalists held a new round of parleys, again encouraged by the British, as Britain once more contemplated ways to reduce its footprint in the region. By then, David Ben-Gurion had assumed a leading role in conducting Zionist diplomacy, alongside Weizmann, and both of them had a succession of meetings with Arab leaders, Palestinian and other. Assorted intermediaries also busied themselves with proposals for Arab–Jewish rapprochement. This time the new regional framework was envisioned as some sort of British-sanctioned Arab federation. Even Winston Churchill, in 1941, thought regional integration worth exploring:

If such a basis were reached, it is possible that the Jewish State of Western Palestine might form an independent Federal Unit in the Arab Caliphate. This Jewish State would have to have the fullest rights of self-government, including immigration and development.³

These initiatives as well ultimately proved fruitless: first, because of rivalries among Arab leaders; second, because no Arab leader was prepared to extend more than limited autonomy to the Jews in the framework of a pan-Arab state. The Zionists, for their part, insisted upon their own sovereign state in loose federation with its neighbors, and on the basis of shared economic interests. This, again, was more Jewish self-rule than any Arab leader was willing to entertain, and so the Zionists remained locked in their dependence on a foreign power, Britain, at a time when Britain’s own power was waning, as was its commitment to the Zionist project.

Never were the Jews more alone in the world than in the early 1940s. The British had set aside their commitment to Zionism with the White Paper of 1939, limiting Jewish immigration and land purchases. No other Great Power offered its patronage at a time when the great concentration of Jewry in Europe, and Zionism’s demographic reserve, was being cast into the flames by the Nazis. Perceiving Britain’s weakness, Arab nationalists began to imagine their own new post-war regional order – without the British and without the Jews.

In the wake of the Second World War, the dominant security ethos of Israel would be forged in the fire of the Holocaust and would be based on the assumption – reaffirmed by fresh history – that Jews were in fact a people who dwelt alone. This led to three conclusions: it would be a mistake to assume the consistent support of any friend; a Jewish state would have to provide its own defense; and no security architecture could be allowed to substitute for Jewish power.

This approach was vindicated in 1948, when Israel declared its independence and was attacked by virtually all of its Arab neighbors. The Jews essentially won the war on their own. Fortunately, their Arab opponents were disorganized; had they not been, the outcome might have been very different. Israel achieved an astounding victory over a ramshackle Arab coalition that

collapsed under the stress of war. But it did so in a manner so humiliating that it insured Israel's pariah status for decades to come.

Post-1948 attempts at regional security

Isolated and boycotted by the Arab world, the new State of Israel under Ben-Gurion's leadership set out with determination to forge a chain of relationships with powers extraneous to the region, in its two-fold pursuit of both weapons and recognition. Partners in the early years included the Soviet Union and France. Closer to home, Israel courted states and movements on the periphery of the Arab Middle East. These included Turkey, Iran and Ethiopia, as well as various minorities opposed to Arab or Muslim supremacy, such as the Maronite Christians of Lebanon and the Kurds of northern Iraq. "There is no need for us to establish an alliance immediately," Ben-Gurion wrote about these relationships in 1958. "But promoting ties of friendship and cooperation – even if secret for now – in areas of science and economics ... has great value."⁴ This would later be called "the periphery doctrine," but it constituted little more than an ever-shifting series of bilateral ties. In the meantime, Israel was excluded not only from such Arab structures as the Arab League but also from its Western-sponsored alternatives, first and foremost the 1955 Baghdad Pact.

Time and again, Israel's Arab neighbors attempted to organize coalitions, pacts and unions against it. This included, most ominously for Israel, the United Arab Republic (UAR), which unified Egypt and Syria under one command, beginning in 1958. But all of these formations eventually broke up (the UAR did so in 1961), so that in 1967, Israel didn't face enemies embedded in a fully articulated network of mutual security. Instead, the Arab states constituted a mosaic of competing and conflicting interests, without central coordination or even consultation. The Arabs were less than the sum of their parts – and the parts were not exactly models of efficiency, either.

The defeat Israel inflicted on the Arabs over six days in June 1967 represented the turning point in the Middle East geopolitical and security equation. One Jewish state, acting alone, defeated a coalition of Arab states primed for battle by 20 years of intensive pan-Arab and anti-Israel indoctrination. The defeat of 1967 was even more humiliating than 1948, prompting a major reassessment among many Arabs, some of whom concluded that it was not Israeli expansionism that posed a threat to the Arabs but, if anything, Israel's exclusion and isolation. Were Israel somehow incorporated in the region, it could therefore be contained and transformed into a "normal" neighbor. Israel would remain temperamentally aggressive, no doubt, and still alien to its Arab surroundings; but no longer so deeply threatening and destabilizing. In any case, "as a practical matter, the Arabs cannot destroy Israel," announced the Egyptian diplomat Tahsin Bashir, "any more than Israel can destroy the Arabs."⁵

Egyptian president Anwar Sadat was the first to translate this line of reasoning into actual, concrete policy. In 1973, he waged a limited war (in a very loose military partnership with Syria), with the purpose of restoring Egyptian land and honor, both so damaged in 1967. Sadat, however, then sought to go one step further by leveraging Egypt's modest military achievements into a broad peace offensive that would take both Egypt and Israel out of their cycle of perennial wars, and open before Israel a path to regional integration.

When Sadat came to Jerusalem in November 1977 and posed with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin before the cameras, it was the first such historic photo-op since the Faisal–

Weizmann meeting in 1918. Israel, Sadat promised, had a place in the security structure of the region. Its status would not be as a tolerated minority and not as a Jewish autonomy, but as a fully sovereign state and Middle Eastern state actor.

But what form might this integration take? After all, since 1967, Israel had gained new prestige in American eyes, with Washington coming to regard Israel as a valuable asset in its own great power drive for regional dominance in opposition to the Soviet Union. Once more, Israel was encouraged to seek its security not in its relations with its immediate neighbors, but with a distant superpower that insisted on building its own alliance of proxies and clients in the region. Because Israel was too strong to be excluded, as the Arabs now admitted, the United States sought to join Israel and its Arab clients together into one US-led regional security system through something that became nominally known as the “peace process.”

The first objective of this open-ended process was the finalizing of borders and the conclusion of bilateral peace agreements between Israel and its Arab neighbors. This took years of patient negotiations, with differing levels of US involvement, but it eventually yielded full peace treaties between Israel and Egypt (1979) and Israel and Jordan (1994). A less comprehensive Oslo agreement was also reached between Israel and the PLO (1993). In parallel, the United States promoted an even more ambitious vision of regional security cooperation on everything from counter-terrorism to water. After the sight of Israeli and Arab leaders shaking hands and smiling before the cameras became fairly commonplace, Israel’s ever-optimistic visionary Shimon Peres, in a moment of enthusiasm, announced the advent of “the new Middle East.”⁶

Yet this development never blossomed into a full-blown regional security regime. There were two reasons. First, the Arabs remained divided among themselves over relations with the United States and over the peace with Israel. Egypt and Jordan were in; Syria and Iraq were out; Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states sat on the sidelines. Even in Egypt and Jordan, both countries that had concluded peace treaties with Israel, significant domestic opposition to “normalization” limited the scope for cooperation. Periodic eruptions of Israeli–Palestinian violence only further fueled this opposition, providing a convenient pretext for keeping Israel at arm’s length.

Second, and just as important, Israel’s strategic ties to the United States continued to deepen. While the “special relationship” expanded into every possible field, its security dimension loomed over everything else and incorporated not just hardware but strategic planning. As Israel came increasingly under the American umbrella, its regional partnerships remained confined largely to the realm of counter-terrorism, with very little joint consideration given to the larger-magnitude threats the region might face.

Israeli security in an era of regional insecurity

In 1957, Middle East analyst Majid Khadduri, in asking why all previous attempts at regional organization of the Middle East had failed, concluded it was “the underlying factors in Middle East society which have constantly militated against building up a regional security structure.” He attached especial significance to “The Balkanization of the Middle East” (by which he meant the post–First World War partition of the Ottoman provinces into separate states) – a phenomenon that he considered to lie “at the root of the regional security problems.”⁷

If that were true in 1957, is it not even truer today? In recent years, the Middle East has undergone a second wave of Balkanization, fragmenting the states that existed 60 years ago into still smaller entities. The regional map has become a patchwork of older states, failed states,

newer semi-states and sub-state upstarts. This Balkanization has transformed Israel's geopolitical environment and changed realities along its borders.

- Proceeding clockwise, from the Mediterranean, one begins in Lebanon, site of a past civil war, where there has been a continuous erosion of central governing authority, never especially strong in the first place. The Iranian-backed *Hizbullah* acts as a state within a state, commanding independent military capabilities of state-like magnitude. So powerful has it become, that it has risen to the top of Israel's own list of military threats;
- The disintegration of Syria has created another vacuum on Israel's borders. Israel at one point had seriously entertained ceding the Golan Heights in return for "peace" with Syria. Had it done so, the civil war for Syria would have unfolded on the very cusp of the upper Galilee. Syria, once a strong state, has become a weak one, owing its very existence (in truncated borders) to Russian intervention in the air and Iranian intervention on the ground. Meanwhile, the area adjacent to Israel's border has become contested space between regime and opposition;
- To the east, the Palestinians have broken themselves into two antagonistic geographic enclaves, in the West Bank and Gaza. The effect of the secession of *Hamas*-ruled Gaza has been to reduce the legitimacy of the Ramallah-based government of the Palestinian Authority. Effectively, it has also put paid to any prospect of a negotiated Israeli–Palestinian agreement, for lack of a credible Palestinian interlocutor. There is no Palestinian state, but there are two distinct and separate nuclei of one, in bitter rivalry with one another;
- As for Egypt, for a frightening moment in 2011, a surge from below imperiled the Egyptian–Israeli peace treaty, the very foundation of regional order. An Islamist president briefly assumed power, and a mob stormed Israel's embassy in Cairo, leading Israelis to wonder whether Egypt after Mubarak might also go the way of Iran after the Shah. Fortunately, events took a different turn following the restoration of military rule. Yet few doubt that at some point the struggle for Egypt will resume; meanwhile, a remnant of that struggle continues between the regime and its Islamist opposition in the Sinai, just over the border with Israel.

Can a viable regional security regime realistically be expected to arise on such fractured foundations? There certainly exists no known precedent for such an outcome. Within this Arab cauldron the more powerful non-Arab states – Israel, Turkey and Iran – act militarily beyond their borders in a routine way. The only European analogies for this situation that come to mind date from before the Second World War.

The US and the regional balance of power

From this brief historical survey of efforts at regional security in the Middle East, one set of conclusions emerge in full relief. The region itself generates insecurity, not security. Different and differing parts are in a perpetual state of disharmony. Only outside powers have ever succeeded in orchestrating something like an alliance – and that, too, only within very circumscribed limits. Not surprisingly, then, Israel continues to look beyond its neighbors and elsewhere for security and for alternative, supplementary sources of power.

These extra-regional sources include, most significantly, (1) the United States, (2) American Jews, (3) friendly European powers, especially Germany, and (4) rising powers such as India and

China.

True, Israel seeks active cooperation with Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority in the field of counter-terrorism, in order to guarantee quiet on its own borders. And it keeps a line open to Gulf Arab states in the hope they might moderate the conduct of different factions among the Palestinians. In the final analysis, however, Israel (like the “moderate” Arabs) still looks to Washington to come up with “a plan.” The expectation in Jerusalem persists that at there are still Americans who believe that the United States can, should and must play a forward game in the Middle East and that at the end of the day the United States will make good on its commitments to defend its allies, proxies and clients, whatever the cost.

Is there any prospect of this changing? The answer depends primarily on the future orientation and policy choices of the United States, on the degree of Iranian aggressiveness and on the interaction between them. There is a general preference among all of America’s partners in the Middle East for the United States to play a proactive role in the region. On the other hand, this presents a paradox of sorts. For when the United States acts with resolve, it actually creates a disincentive for Israel’s potential Arab partners to upgrade their own bilateral official or tacit relations with Israel. The reason is that American willingness to bear the burden for regional stability and security inevitably encourages Middle Eastern clients to see Washington as the first and only necessary address for dealing with security challenges. The United States may lecture its clients that they must do more on their own, and do it together with one another, but why should America’s Arab allies make plans with Israel, if the United States has planes in the air and boots on the ground?

In the past decade, however, America’s role in the Middle East has become less predictable, and its own attitude toward playing a global role more erratic. In retrospect, the 2003 Iraq War represents the high watermark of American involvement in the region. Thereafter, the Obama Administration began a deliberate policy of retrenchment, while the Trump Administration, seeking to undo the legacy of the Obama years, has demonstrated a similar wariness against any deeper entanglement in the Middle East. Clearly, the sharpest break with Obama policy has been over the Iran nuclear deal, from which Trump has withdrawn. Whether the American exit from the deal will lead to an escalation of conflict with Iran, or merely substitute for it, only time will tell.

Washington’s erratic conduct in recent years is being met by Iranian persistence in pursuit of regional dominance. There is no active zone of conflict in the region in which the Iranians do not play a role, whether behind the scenes or out in front. From Lebanon to Yemen, from Iraq to Syria, from the Persian Gulf to the Gaza Strip – the Iranians continue to invest money, men and *matériel* in a drive for region-wide influence. In effect, the Iranians are seeking to create their own broader regional security regime. This Iran-centered regime would serve their national interests in partnership with clients (most of them Shiite) who are determined on both religious and political grounds to overturn traditional Sunni dominance in the Arab lands.

In the 40 years since Ayatollah Khomeini’s 1979 revolution, Iran has managed to create a wedge extending from Iran and the Persian Gulf, through Iraq and Syria, and into Lebanon fronting on the Mediterranean Sea. Ironically, the two most formidable obstacles to the territorial contiguity of this wedge – Saddam Hussein and the Islamic State (ISIS) – have been neutralized or removed, not by Iran but by the United States. Iran is opportunistically taking full advantage of the American “war on terror” to build its own security architecture in places where the United States tore down rogue regimes and left a vacuum.

Uncertainty about the American role and an intensification of Iran’s interventions from Syria

to Iraq to Yemen have combined to evoke an unprecedented degree of open and favorable signaling between Israel and Saudi Arabia, America's other privileged "special relation" in the Middle East. Something similar is occurring between Israel and the United Arab Emirates. The idea that Israel might be integrated in an anti-Iranian security alliance – including Saudi Arabia and the UAE, while coordinating policies as well with Egypt and Jordan – is regarded as arguably the single most important shift in regional geopolitics in the past decade.

A 2018 *U.S. News & World Report* listing of the world's most powerful countries opened with the usual litany of global powers (the United States, China and Russia), followed by Europe's traditional three leaders (Germany, the United Kingdom and France), followed by Japan. But rounding out the top ten, in order, were Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.⁸ When Egypt and Jordan are added to the group, it possesses a combined GDP four times that of Iran, and combined defense spending that is five times greater than Iran's. Were these five states to coordinate their security policies, they could pose a formidable blocking counter to Iranian ambitions.

How would their "new Middle East" differ from its predecessor of a generation ago? That earlier version – with the European Union as inspiration and model – assumed as a precondition an Israeli–Palestinian final status settlement, culminating in Israel's "normalization" and regional economic integration. The proposed new constellation would be quite different. The security dimension would trump the economic one, and it would rest not on the promising incentive of regional economic cooperation but on the threat of Iranian imperial ambition. Similarly, an Israeli–Palestinian settlement would no longer be a prerequisite for progress, nor would there be any imperative for public validation in ceremonies held on the White House lawn. It would be an invisible war alliance, and its very invisibility would serve to insulate it from public opinion. This would be a secret deal among states and regimes for self-preservation, not an open embrace for peace and prosperity.

As of this writing, it is impossible to predict how far the recent and emerging trend might progress. This largely covert alliance will likely last as long as perceived American weakness and the perceived threat of Iranian hegemony persist. If both become long-term trends and do in fact harden into fixed patterns of conduct, then this covert alliance might also harden into fixed patterns of interaction. Europe during the long Cold War divided into east and west; the Middle East, during a long cold war, might divide into north and south, with Israel integrating into the southern tier of opposition to the Iranian-led northern tier.

Here might very well be the nucleus of a regional security regime, not on the European Union model, but of the Cold War variety. (It might resemble the Cold War even more if the United States consistently backs the southern tier and Russia the northern). The closest parallel would be the period from the late 1940s through the early 1960s, when the Western and Soviet blocs were still testing one another, from the Berlin blockade through the U-2 overflights to the Cuban crisis. These events helped forge the Western alliance, tighten cooperation, establish red lines and assure the success of containment policy. To be sure, they also came at a huge material and psychological cost, and at several tense moments of acute crisis (1956, 1962, 1973) might have easily and quickly escalated into full-scale and even non-conventional war.

Fortunately, the Middle East is not an arena of nuclear rivalry, at least not yet. If outside powers do retain a lingering and central role in the region, it surely lies in the area of nonproliferation. They have a responsibility to engage, not only for the sake of the region but for their own security, and for that of the international system. Israel does possess a nuclear capacity, but is also the only state in the Middle East functioning as an advanced Western liberal

democracy. Were other Middle Eastern states ever to achieve the same level of accountability to their peoples, they too might claim to be trustworthy stewards of a bomb. Barring that eventuality, it must be assumed proliferation would be profoundly destabilizing and dangerous. Consequently, the one favor the United States, in particular, can do for the Middle East is to spare it the nightmare scenario of domino-like proliferation across the region, beginning (but not ending) with Iran.

Back to the future: Weizmann–Faisal revisited

The literature on regional security in the Middle East resembles the literature on the “peace process.” Most of it is completely divorced from reality. This is so even when it acknowledges that the Middle East is a special case, and that regional integration will be a gradual process.

Yet just as a stable status quo has become the working substitute for the “peace process,” so might a stable status quo substitute for a regional security regime. This status quo is imperfect, and its operations are punctuated by occasional crises. Nevertheless, its basic operating mechanisms tend to prevent the escalation of those crises, and perhaps such an informal coalition in support of the status quo and regional stability now constitutes the best of all possible worlds. Of course, reinforcing the status quo will require a growing degree of cooperation between Israel and its potential Arab partners. Indeed, the more crises they navigate together, the more solid their relationships might become.

For Israel, in the meantime, regional relations will still take a back seat to its “special relationship” with the United States, its privileged ties to Europe and its burgeoning economic cooperation with East and South Asia. Nevertheless, as Israel enters the next phase of its history, between its 70th anniversary and its centennial in 2048, its demonstrated permanence is likely to open more doors for regional cooperation. Most of them will be back doors, but one or two front doors may open as well, leading perhaps to another round of peace treaties. The most likely candidates are the most successful of the Arab states, in the outer belt astride the Persian Gulf.

Should that scenario play out, it would bring to final fruition that early encounter between Chaim Weizmann and the Emir Faisal, the Mecca-born son of Arabia’s potentate of a century ago. Among the present-day Arabian emirs perhaps there is one who would commit to standing before the cameras and next to an Israeli leader. After all, everything has changed: the Jews in their land number not 60,000 but more than six million, a hundred-fold increase. Now they form not a small minority community, but a sovereign state and a regional power. Were that breakthrough to happen, a regional security regime might no longer seem far-fetched to Israelis. Otherwise, the likely scenario is more of the same.

Notes

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- 2 Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and Error: The Autobiography of Chaim Weizmann*. London: H. Hamilton, 1949, p. 294.
- 3 Churchill memorandum, “Syrian Policy,” *British National Archives*, May 19, 1941, PREM 3/422/2.
- 4 Ben-Gurion to Abba Eban, May 20, 1958, quoted by Michael Bar-Zohar, *Ben-Gurion*, Vol. 3 (Hebrew). Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1987, p. 1325.
- 5 Quoted by Milton Viorst, *Sands of Sorrow: Israel’s Journey From Independence*. New York: Harper & Row, 1987, p. 19.
- 6 Shimon Peres (with Arye Naor), *The New Middle East*. New York: Henry Holt, 1993.
- 7 Majid Khadduri, “The Problem of Regional Security in the Middle East: An Appraisal,” *Middle East Journal* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1957): 12.

8 “2018 Best Countries Rankings: Power,” *U.S. News and World Report*. www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/power-rankings.

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Israel's expanding strategic horizons

Finding extra-regional security partners

Eran Lerman

Israel's security horizons have greatly expanded in recent years, with 2017 constituting a major turning point. Israeli diplomacy scored several breakthroughs, all related to a growing level of security cooperation and, given Prime Minister Netanyahu's dual portfolio as Minister of Foreign Affairs, all orchestrated at the highest government level. This collaboration may take different forms – from military sales to intelligence sharing and cyber defense – but the overall rationale for the growing network of bilateral and multilateral relations with Israel and by Israel is patently clear: the quest for common responses to common threats. The “Blue Flag” 2017 air force exercise hosted by Israel in November can serve as confirmation for this improved state of strategic affairs.

United we stand; united we fly

Launched in 2013 as a biennial event, the “Blue Flag” series of combined aerial training exercises began with only three national air forces represented: American, Italian and Greek. This time, by contrast, the two-week exercise, unprecedented in terms of foreign participation, involved seven countries: Greece, Italy, Poland and the United States; Israel; and for the first time France, Germany and India. A total of 35 non-Israeli planes and some 1,000 pilots and crews from both Israel and abroad engaged in simulating a series of intense combat scenarios.¹

In addition to a mutual learning process among highly skilled professionals, there was most definitely an added diplomatic dimension to the publicized event. While citing or targeting no specific hypothetical enemy, a community of like-minded nations joined together in working hard at improving each other's military deterrent and attack capabilities. Moreover, from Israel's standpoint the media applauded hosting the event as “a demonstration that more countries are willing to engage with it publicly as strategic allies.”²

Nor should the singularly poignant symbolism behind “Blue Flag” 2017 be ignored. The IAF colonel commanding the air base at ‘Uvda and overseeing the entire multilateral exercise is a grandson of Holocaust survivors and thus bears the scars of memory many Israelis still carry. And here he was hosting German pilots with the Luftwaffe insignia on the tails of their

Eurofighters – and this on a week marking the 79th anniversary of *Kristalnacht*. Duly noted was the German squadron commander’s willingness not only to speak at a general gathering on behalf of all the guest forces, but to weave in a full minute in Hebrew.³

Ultimately, however, the “Blue Flag” drill is not about exorcizing ghosts of the past. It is an important part of a conscious policy of outreach designed to shore up and cement strategic partnerships – present and future. Israel today enjoys a significant level of security cooperation with each of the seven participating nations, as detailed below. Nor does this exhaust the list of bilateral relationships, tacit and overt.

Major strategic partners: the United States and Israel

Among Israel’s broadening security relationships, the most important by far is and will continue to be with the United States. This “special relationship,” as President Kennedy was the first to call it in a meeting with then-Foreign Minister Golda Meir in 1962, is by now enshrined in American law. In 2014, the US Congress enacted the United States–Israel Strategic Partnership Act (SPA) that contains among its provisions a clause elevating Israel to the new status of a “Major Strategic Partner.”⁴ This constituted a meaningful upgrading of Israel’s previous (1989) designation as a “major non-NATO ally,” a term that as of 2016 was still applied to only 16 privileged countries.⁵

The SPA legislation reaffirms the legally binding duty of American administrations to sustain Israel’s Qualitative Military Edge (QME) against any likely coalition of hostile forces. This concept, first put forward by President Ronald Reagan, became law some 20 years later, in September 2008, in a rider inserted into H.R. 7177, “The Naval Vessel Transfer Act of 2008.”⁶ Late in his presidency and angered at Israeli policies, Barack Obama reportedly questioned the utility of this commitment.⁷ Nevertheless, reconfirmation of the QME commitment came in another milestone Memorandum of Understanding signed by the US and Israel in September 2016, which pledged an American military assistance program worth 38 billion dollars over a ten-year period.⁸

During President Donald Trump’s precedent-breaking visit in May 2017 (the first time in which a sitting US President included Israel as well as Saudi Arabia and the Vatican as destinations on his inaugural trip abroad), he reaffirmed his and America’s unequivocal commitment to the QME.⁹ Left open are the fine details of how Israel’s qualitative edge should and will be preserved in the wake of the \$110 billion worth of advanced weapons promised Saudi Arabia. One clue into the Trump Administration’s set of working premises is the stance he adopted both in Jerusalem and in Riyadh. The President took the opportunity to stress that in marked contrast to his predecessor he endorses their shared interest in curtailing Tehran’s growing influence and potential dominance in the region. US Middle East strategy wishes to regard the two countries as *de facto* allies against Iran rather than as implacable enemies.

The full range of the US–Israeli relationship, its implications and the complex interaction between its moral, economic, political, diplomatic and military dimensions lie far beyond the scope of this chapter. Besides which, these multifaceted ties have been extensively reviewed and analyzed, by scholars as well as practitioners.¹⁰ Contrary to the widely accepted image of a lopsided patron–client relationship, this has been – in terms of its contribution to US security interests – a two-way street far more than meets the eye.

Israeli intelligence, for example, has been of use to the West and to the US since the early

stages of the Cold War. One of the more famous and declassified instances took place in 1956, when the *Mossad* provided the CIA with the invaluable text of Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech at the 20th conference of the CPSU, exposing Josef Stalin's enormous crimes.¹¹ Over the years Israel's principal intelligence agencies, the Military Intelligence Directorate (DMI or "*Aman*") and the "*Mossad*," steadily cultivated close relations with their American counterparts, mainly the Defense Intelligence Agency and the CIA. This professional and institutional collaboration enabled the flow of highly secret and sensitive intelligence data of inestimable importance, especially in 1990–1991 and, again, after 2001, when America became deeply involved militarily in the region, confronting enemies and tactics with which Israel was painfully familiar.¹²

Another dimension of the two-way street is the inventory of Israeli-designed technological solutions that have helped provide protection to US forces in asymmetrical combat situations. This catalog includes such diversified items as IED (improvised explosive devices) countermeasures, ballistic missile defenses and cyber weaponry.¹³

Side-by-side with the basic affinity of democratic values linking the two countries,¹⁴ and the political influence exerted by Israel's friends in Washington, these highly pragmatic, geopolitical security interests of mutual concern shore up the special relationship. Quite probably, they will continue to do so for years to come. Still, this said, it is definitely in Israel's interest to widen and diversify its independent web of auxiliary partnerships without abandoning or weakening the bedrock US–Israeli bond. Arguably, it may very well be in America's interest, too, in the sense that the image of Israel as a wholly dependent client state does not necessarily serve US policy goals, certainly not in the Middle East.

America plus – securing auxiliary partnerships

Yet another reason of late for pursuing a forward foreign and security policy of broadening the country's horizons stems from genuine concern at the incoherence as well as inconsistencies of US global intentions and commitments bridging the Obama and Trump administrations. This air of uncertainty had to have been in the background as early as 2012, when Jerusalem welcomed the Harper government's willingness to adopt a strong pro-Israeli line and affirmation that "a threat to Israel is a threat to Canada."¹⁵ Since then a special bond has been forged with Canada that translates among other things into a number of joint training programs and close military cooperation.

Guided by a mixture of motives mirroring a combination of greater self-confidence and lingering insecurities, Israeli statecraft can cite a rather remarkable list of interstate interactions in recent years marked by personal diplomacy at the highest level, more so in 2017 than ever before. In the short span of barely ten months, Israel's diplomatic calendar and Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's personal diary featured official visits to Australia and Singapore, to the ECOWAS summit in Liberia, to a number of European capitals and a groundbreaking trip to Latin America, as well as historic journeys to Israel by the leaders of the US and India.

One country Netanyahu conspicuously did not visit in 2017 was Germany, owing as much as anything to strains in his personal relationship with Chancellor Angela Merkel. Thus, for instance, Berlin expressed anger at leaks originating in Israel following the two leaders' meeting in February when Mrs. Merkel reportedly shared Netanyahu's well-known skepticism as to the likelihood of a two-state solution to the Israeli–Palestinian dispute.¹⁶ Matters worsened when

annual ministerial consultations, held regularly for six years and scheduled for May, were put off “for scheduling reasons.” The postponement was announced a month after Netanyahu refused to see Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel because of the latter’s uncoordinated meeting with a left-wing Israeli NGO during his visit in Israel.¹⁷

From this perspective, it is all the more noteworthy that the bilateral security cooperation continues to flourish. Germany in a number of ways represents Israel’s second most important military supplier, dating back to the 1950s when the newly established Federal Republic made reconciliation with the Jewish people and the Jewish state of Israel a key to German re-integration into the world community.¹⁸ Over the years, German military exports to Israel have acquired primary strategic significance. Today they include Dolphin-class submarines, which are an essential component in Israel’s naval and overall deterrent capability, as well as surface ships designed to defend Israel’s exclusive economic zone (EEZ). Besides which, these major deals are being supported by a substantial subsidy from the German government.¹⁹

In recent years, Israel–German security cooperation has expanded to encompass close intelligence cooperation and regularized military-to-military consultations; mutual visits by senior officials; the transfer of four Patriot PAC-2 batteries to Israel; and German participation in ground and air training, culminating in the “Blue Flag exercise.”²⁰ Of note, Germany is one of Israel’s customers for the Heron TP drones manufactured by the Israel Aerospace Industries and used for force protection.

Assuming the role of a seafaring nation

The importance attached by Israel to the acquisition of surface naval vessels from Germany is part of a broader strategic reorientation reflecting (a) the changing regional balance of power as well as (b) the transformative economic potential of Israel’s offshore gas fields.²¹ One definite indication of this new thinking in Jerusalem is the tightening strategic alliance with both Greece and Cyprus that might well represent the most significant current improvement in Israel’s international position. A strategic bloc of growing importance is emerging in the eastern Mediterranean as Israel faces the imperative for protecting its economic domain and offshore maritime assets.²² The most recent of the three tripartite summits held so far took place in Thessaloniki in June 2017, bringing together for purposes of consultation Prime Minister Netanyahu, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras of Greece and President Nikos Anastasiades of Cyprus. Their closing statement at Thessaloniki perhaps intentionally did not mention the three countries’ strides toward concerting efforts on military affairs; but in this case, actions speak louder than words.

Participation by Greece in the latest “Blue Flag” exercises is but one facet of security cooperation. Several months previously, in March 2017, Israeli Air Force F-16s took part in “*Iniohos 2017*,” a multinational exercise that for the first time included a contingent from the United Arab Emirates at Andravida AFB in Greece in keeping with a regular pattern of IAF training in Greece’s airspace.²³ In October, the Greek Defense Ministry announced that Israel, Cyprus and Egypt (another first) would be joining European crews in yet another air exercise over Greece aimed at bolstering security in the eastern Mediterranean.²⁴

Cyprus, for its part, has hosted several IAF training missions in recent years, and in June 2017, a major deployment – unprecedented in scope and purpose – of hundreds of ground troops from the IDF’s commando brigade and other units, as well as air force helicopters for an exercise with

Cypriot forces in the Troodos Mountains. Not surprisingly called “Mountain Air,” this was carefully designed to simulate possible operational scenarios in high altitudes – which for Israel can only mean preparation for comprehensive warfare against *Hizbullah* in the mountainous terrain of Lebanon.²⁵ This, as well as the preceding “*Onisilos-Gideon*” joint air force exercise in March 2017, serves as a strong indicator of how far Cyprus is now willing to go to enhance the military partnership with Israel, despite some internal dissent and loud Turkish complaints.²⁶

Israel, Greece and Cyprus presently share a triad of preoccupations: interest in the exploitation of offshore gas (and potentially oil); concern about Ankara’s obstructionism and Erdogan’s Islamist policies inside Turkey; and nervousness at further regional destabilization, particularly in Egypt. Therefore, it is safe to assume this tripartite alliance will draw even closer in coming years – and will be open to incorporating other like-minded players in the eastern Mediterranean basin.

East of Suez: relations with India

Turning to another significant participant in the “Blue Flag” exercise, Israel’s security cooperation with India has also acquired strategic dimensions. The foundations of that relationship were laid a generation ago, when Israel effectively responded to India’s arms needs during the dangerous Kargil crisis with Pakistan in 1999.²⁷ Today, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the once unfriendly relationship has taken on a new momentum, dramatically displayed during Modi’s first-time state visit to Israel in early July 2017. His trip was marked by scenes of striking personal amity with Netanyahu, with whom he held wide-ranging discussions about mutually beneficial projects in several fields, from space and cyber to education and agriculture.²⁸

While ambitious civilian projects crowd the agenda, the military dimension remains central to the relationship. India is by far the largest export market for Israel’s defense industries – estimated at more than 40% of the total. By 2017, India possessed the world’s largest fleet of Israeli drones. While lagging behind Russia by a factor of ten, Israel is India’s third largest supplier of arms (the US is the second). Should recent trends continue, Israel’s role in the modernization of India’s military forces may yet become still more significant, with important projects established – under Modi’s rallying call, “Make in India” – for production in India of Israeli-designed weapons, ranging from the Tavor rifle to the Barak 8 ship-based air defense system.²⁹

Not that Israel’s position as a major source for New Delhi’s arms acquisitions is altogether assured or obstacle-free. In November 2017, the Indian Ministry of Defense unilaterally canceled an anti-tank Spike missile contract won against stiff American competition, reversing its former decision and opting for an alternative system to be developed in India by the Defense Research and Development Organization.³⁰ This setback is unlikely to change the overall pattern of close security relations nor diminish their strategic significance. For Israel, the importance of arms sales or joint production with India on the grand scale now emerging goes beyond the monetary gain or the role of the industries in economic growth and technological innovation. The viability of an indigenous industrial base, providing the IDF with state of the art capabilities tailored to its needs, depends upon economies of scale, which can only be sustained, in turn, by finding promising export markets. Clients and partners of India’s magnitude are thus vital to Israeli longer-term national security and survival.

Pivoting to Asia

India is by far Israel's largest partner in Asia, but not the only one. In February 2017, Prime Minister Netanyahu's visits (again, the first of their kind) to Singapore and Australia signaled a further step towards strengthening "security, economic and other ties" with both, as Netanyahu put it on the eve of his journey.³¹ While the full scope of security cooperation with Singapore remains undisclosed, Israel is indeed, as reported on the visit, one of the island nation's "oldest and most important military partners." Moreover, in sharp contrast with the violent reaction to President Chaim Herzog's visit 30 years ago, Netanyahu's daylong stay (and Prime Minister Lee Hsien Long's visit to Israel in April 2016) passed practically without comment from either Indonesia or Malaysia, Singapore's large Muslim neighbors.³²

In Australia, despite some opposition on the Labor left, Netanyahu met with an even warmer welcome from Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and his government. Anthony Bergin, a leading analyst in Canberra's most prominent think tank, ASPI, used the opportunity to urge his government to upgrade security cooperation with Israel, which he felt fell far short of their potential. He specifically cited Israel's "experience in urban warfare and in the development of unmanned aerial systems for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and combat," as well as its "social resilience" in the face of terror attacks – a challenge Australians have been forced to confront in recent years.³³ Premier Turnbull paid a reciprocal visit to Israel in October 2017, personally marking the centennial of the charge of the 4th Australian Light Horse Brigade which wrested Beersheba from the Ottomans and thus paved the way to Britain's conquest of Palestine, itself a precondition for Israel's independence 31 years later.

Significantly, following the prime ministers' formal meeting in Jerusalem on 30 October, their two countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding on bilateral security cooperation that, as officially worded, "encourages cooperation between the two countries' security industries, including in innovation" while laying the foundations for closer exchanges of information at the inter-governmental level.³⁴ Remaining to be seen is the extent to which this formal commitment will impact on the ongoing security interaction beyond the intelligence cooperation already established.

One of the arguments put forward for improving Australia's ties with Israel is that the latter has already forged significant security and trade partnerships in East and South-East Asia – "pivoting" in Netanyahu's choice of phrase – and specifically with Japan and Vietnam. There is no reason for Australia to lag behind these precedents, especially since neither Japan nor Vietnam has forced any linkage between beneficial ties with Israel and the Palestinian issue.

The transformative moment in Israel's security relationship with Japan occurred back in May 2014, when Netanyahu and his wife paid an unusually cordial visit to Tokyo, followed by a reciprocal visit to Israel by Premier Shinzō Abe in January 2015.³⁵ As of 2017, there has been a steady rise in bilateral interactions, including commerce and investment as well as closer military ties. Given Abe's openly declared ambition to build up Japan's military capacity in an unstable environment, Israel seems to loom large as a potential partner.³⁶ Here, too, however, prospects are clouded because of deep structural impediments as well as long-established habits of dependence upon US suppliers that are still at work in slowing down the momentum.

The underlying reason for the military buildup in Japan and several other Asian countries is mounting fear of China's rise and the growing imbalance of power. This has given rise to spreading interest in Israeli offerings in the way of flexible, innovative military solutions and armaments modified to meet specific local and regional Asian challenges. Oddly enough in terms

of the Chinese factor, in 1980, after suffering losses in the war against Vietnam, the People's Republic of China had taken the lead in reaching out for Israeli military assistance. By 2015 roles had been reversed or certainly complicated, with Israeli GPS-guided MLRS systems deployed to defend Vietnamese islands in the South China Sea. In March 2017, Vietnam reportedly expressed an interest in the Delilah, an Israeli long-range standoff air-launched cruise missile, as well as other Israeli-made weapon systems.³⁷ A month earlier, the visit by Israel Military Industries chairman Yitzhak Aharonovitch – during which he was hosted by President Trang Dai Quang – signaled a step forward in a relationship struck back in March 2015, when the two defense ministries concluded an MoU on defense cooperation. Soon afterwards, the state visit by president Reuven (“Ruvi”) Rivlin seemed to offer further proof, as a Vietnamese journalist put it, that “Israel, Vietnam are brothers in arms.”³⁸

To round off the list of key Asian players, the cautious South Koreans for decades felt constrained by their security dependence on the US and preference for American arms. In one instance, in marketing their T-50 Golden Eagle supersonic advanced trainers and light combat aircraft as suitable for the IAF, Seoul expressed disappointment with Israel after losing their competitive bid to Italy and Germany. That glitch in relations notwithstanding, South Korean leaders continue to regard Israel as a partner in innovative military projects.³⁹

Turning next to relations with the Philippines, one can still detect an enduring sense of Israeli gratitude for President Manuel Quezon's offer of refuge to European Jews in the 1930s, and for the 1947 vote in favor of partition and Jewish statehood. In more contemporary and geopolitical terms, there is a sense of commonality due to the active threat of terrorism and Islamist subversion – rebels in Marawi city in October 2017 swearing allegiance to the “Islamic State” – reportedly leading to a growing level of security cooperation and the sale of security-related systems.⁴⁰ On the other side of the balance sheet, some of President Rodrigo Duterte's public statements have raised questions as to his suitability as a partner, despite the desire that he and his military have expressed to count on Israeli weapons.⁴¹

Last but anything but least in the expanding roster of Israel's Asian partnerships is, of course, mainland China. In conducting this diplomatic, economic and strategic outreach across the Far East, Israeli negotiators have had meticulously to manage interactions with the People's Republic of China. Under intense American pressure and scrutiny, sale of any weapons or dual-use items by Israel without Washington's prior consent is strictly precluded. The aborted supply of Phalcon Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) planes in 2000 was taken badly in Beijing, setting back bilateral ties for a number of years.

The Chinese government and people perhaps forgive but do not forget; and in order to keep the relationship with the PRC on an even keel Israel has had to shift the weight of its offerings to prospective non-military contributions. Health, water management, education and, above all, scientific and technological innovation are promoted in dealing with China together with a growing Israeli interest in President Xi Jinping's “One Belt, One Road” initiative. A certain sentimental affinity of one ancient people to another provides an additional dimension to the relationship. Conversely, Chinese impatience may grow as Israel redoubles efforts at supplying arms to India and other countries suspiciously viewing the PRC as a looming threat.⁴² Navigating the so-called Asian Elephant Trail may therefore become increasingly challenging in the years ahead.

The European connection

In turning next to Europe and to its place in Israel strategic thinking and planning, there are detectable signs of a renewed interest in cooperation with Israel, and not only by Germany and Greece. As in Asia, this positive reassessment of Israel's worth mirrors, among other factors, a sense of increased danger due to the combined impact of the migration crisis, the permanent state of alert against terrorism and fears raised by Russian aggressive policy on the eastern flank of the continent.

Once again, in Europe as in the eastern Mediterranean and Asian spheres, complications arise from Israel's conscious attempts to diversify its globally oriented security relations. If restricted to its narrower Middle Eastern political context, Jerusalem's insistence upon maintaining a robust diplomatic relationship with Moscow reflects commendable prudence – retaining freedom of action in Syria while keeping open vital lines of communication for “de-confliction” with the Russians.

However, that policy occasionally raises eyebrows among Israel's friends in central and Eastern Europe who view with mounting concern Vladimir Putin's assertiveness in the Ukraine and elsewhere. In countering criticism, Israeli spokespersons have sought to clarify – with only mixed success – that the Russian relationship is one of expedience, that it has no military ramifications beyond Syria and that Israel stands by its friendship with the free countries of Eastern Europe.

This tension is apparent, for example, in Israel's relations with the Baltic states and with Poland. Here the interaction is complex and fraught with collective memories, with history's hold manifested in the ugly row that erupted in August 2017 over Warsaw's decision to exclude Russia from a commemorative event at the Sobibor extermination camp – a decision the Russians rather incongruously chose to blame on Israel.⁴³ Intra-regional European politics aside – and solely from a security standpoint – official Israel perceives Poland first and foremost as a lucrative growth market for advanced Israeli technologies.

On several occasions, Israeli corporations have undercut each other and fought against foreign rivals in competing to secure large contracts with the Polish army, such as a \$1 billion sale of drones. In the end, a complex deal was crafted with the US under which Israeli industries agreed not to bid independently for a missile defense contract but to act as sub-contractors producing interceptors for the system.⁴⁴ This, in turn, secured another \$1 billion or so for Israel's Rafael defense technology company and re-confirmed Poland's role as a major market for high-end Israeli defense exports.⁴⁵

For Poland as well as for her partners in the Visegrád Group – The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, all of whom have their own level of security and intelligence cooperation with Israel – these dealings have come to be embedded in a broader framework which includes participation in military exercises and high-level visits.

This brings into focus a paradoxical aspect of Israel's security relationship with the Europeans. Overall, bilateral security relations with key member states of the European Union – indeed, with most member states – tend to be good, even intimate. This is the case not only with Germany, as described above. France, while often critical of Israeli policies, has also remained formally committed to Israel's security. The two countries have established a variety of cooperative projects, including the French procurement of Israeli drones and Black Sparrow target missile systems and aiding in the launching of Israeli satellites into space.⁴⁶

French participation in “Blue Flag” marked the first time French fighter pilots deployed to

Israel since 1956, when French squadrons undertook to defend Israel's airspace during the war in Sinai. Intelligence sharing and high-level military and defense consultations take place regularly; and on key issues, such as Iran, the French position has been the closest to Israel's of all the six negotiating parties of the 2015 JCPOA nuclear agreement. At the highest political level, while criticizing Israeli settlement policy President Emmanuel Macron also used the occasion of Netanyahu's visit in July 2017 to speak out unambiguously against anti-Zionism, a "reinvented form of anti-Semitism."⁴⁷ Coming from the pillar of the center-left in Europe today, this was a powerful French message aimed at the virulent anti-Israeli stance of the boycott movement.

Italy, yet another European participant in the "Blue Flag exercises," is also one of Israel's major defense partners. In 2012, a \$1 billion transaction provided for the sale to Israel of 30 Aermacchi M-346 trainer jets. In return, Italy signed an equivalent contract to procure Israeli satellites and airborne intelligence gathering systems for Italian planes.⁴⁸ Once again, at the political level, while personal relations may not be as intimate as under Berlusconi or Renzi, there is a broad base of cooperation over stability in the eastern Mediterranean and specifically in Egypt.

Britain, although absent from the 2017 air exercises, is counted as an important security partner for Israel in intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism and cyber defense.⁴⁹ At the highest political level, worthy of note is how Prime Minister Theresa May used the opportunity of Netanyahu's visit to London in November – marking the Balfour Declaration centennial – categorically to reject Palestinian demands that the Declaration be rescinded, and publicly to reaffirm her country's commitment to Israeli security.⁵⁰

A pattern emerges from this survey: while the EU institutions in Brussels – with a limited role in military and intelligence affairs – serve as a conduit for European frustration over Israeli policies on the Palestinian question, key member states in Europe are individually keen to tighten their security and military links with Israel. In 2016, a permanent Israeli liaison office finally opened at NATO headquarters, also in Brussels, when Turkey's opposition was withdrawn after five years,⁵¹ making it now possible for NATO professionals to respect Israel as a contributor and to share assessments, data and planning with Israeli counterparts on issues of mutual concern, such as urban warfare.⁵²

A similar pattern emerges in Israel's relations with African and South American countries. Alongside economic projects and technological innovation, security cooperation – ranging from counter-terrorism to cyber – is the real driver behind the recent revival of Israeli–African ties.⁵³ More often than not official visits have proved extremely useful in furthering the cause. This is also true of Netanyahu's tour of Argentina, Colombia and Mexico (once again, the first ever for an Israeli Prime Minister), where security concerns voiced by these like-minded governments played a constructive role alongside agricultural, water, communications and energy projects.⁵⁴

Shortly after the visit to Mexico, the IDF Home Front Command, the IAF and an NGO specializing in body recovery from destroyed buildings answered the emergency call to organize an urgent search and rescue mission to Mexico City in the wake of a devastating earthquake in September 2017.⁵⁵ Humanitarian aid is thus still another visible component of Israel's military and diplomatic outreach. Rapid disaster responses by Israel are also reciprocal, as seen in 2010 and again in 2016, when timely international firefighting assistance arrived during the disastrous Carmel conflagrations.

Expanding Israel's horizons

The record of Israeli security and military cooperation on a global scale over the past decade highlights at least four key factors accounting for the dramatic change in Israel's international standing.

First, a growing awareness, among what might be called the “cognitive community” – military and intelligence professionals in like-minded nations – that the contemporary surge in terrorism and wave of political instability means we all share the same enemies. Given the high stakes involved, the perspective and the threat assessments put forward by these professionals – who not incidentally tend to identify with both Israel's motives and its *modus operandi* – will continue to influence and guide their political masters.

Second, once a certain political and psychological threshold is crossed, Israel's potential contributions tend to acquire acceptability in three particular fields: counter-terrorism, missile defense and cyber. This suggests that future prospects for Israel's continuing strategic outreach lies in collaboration with select allies and clients in these specific fields, rather than the at times undiscerning sale of standard weapons to problematic customers.⁵⁶

Third, in light of increasing levels of tacit understanding between Israel and “the [Sunni] camp of stability” in the Middle East,⁵⁷ key players beating a path to Israel's door and seeking closer security cooperation no longer have grounds for anxiety about negative reactions or punitive sanctions from Saudi Arabia or other Arab countries.

Finally, and significantly, a fourth enabler is the ability of the IDF and the Israeli security forces to enforce and sustain an effective conflict management template – and to do so despite the rise in violence by Palestinians (mostly “lone wolf” attackers) since the autumn of 2015. Even Palestinians occasionally indicate their appreciation for this policy of containment and de-escalation that has prevented descent into yet another so-called third *Intifada*.⁵⁸

The hard right in Israel may react angrily to this perceived “soft hand” by the IDF. Nevertheless, in all likelihood, it would not have been possible for Israel to pursue such a dramatic widening of her security partnerships and her diplomatic horizons if the violent patterns of the past had taken hold again: in Israel, in the Middle East, in the international media. Present policies of restraint, on the other hand, have made it possible to register high-level breakthroughs even in the absence of a clear pathway towards conflict resolution.

Notes

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Weapon of last resort?

The nuclear dimension

Avner Cohen

Looking back, looking ahead

At the annual state memorial ceremony for Israel's father-founder, David Ben-Gurion, on December 6, 2016 Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu made the following comment about Ben-Gurion's legacy and beyond:

Our military force must be strong enough to repel any foe. It must be capable of taking the war to the enemy's territory, as was done in 1956 and in other wars, and it must be *capable of threatening the annihilation of whoever threatens to annihilate us.*

He went on:

To this end, today we are continuing to cultivate, more than ever, our military and intelligence forces, which in a certain sense, are unrecognizable from what they were in Ben-Gurion's time but, I must say, directly follow the strengthening that he began, and which has continued until the present.

[italics AC]

Netanyahu's statement is extraordinary in more than one sense. While his predecessors had always talked in public about nuclear matters with caution and circumspection, Netanyahu here speaks the unspeakable: Israel's *ability* to threaten annihilation. Technically, Netanyahu may still be complying with the language of opacity, making no explicit reference to nuclear weapons, yet everybody intuitively understands his statement is about nuclear weapons. Furthermore, Netanyahu presents himself as if adding a new nuclear pillar to Ben-Gurion's old security doctrine: Israel must be able to *threaten* annihilation to those who would dare contemplate annihilating Israel.

There is symbolism in this annihilation statement at Ben-Gurion's grave because it was Ben-Gurion who under the shadow of the Holocaust paved the way for a nuclear Israel by invoking the notion that in order to prevent another Auschwitz Israel must be capable of inflicting a

Hiroshima. Moreover, Ben-Gurion was haunted in the 1950s by the very real nightmare scenario of the Arab states, acting together, overwhelming Israel's defense forces. He and his generation thus viewed the bomb as a "last resort" weapon, to be activated only *in extremis*: in the case of an Israeli catastrophe during a conventional war.

Israel is a unique case in global nuclear history, just as its present nuclear conduct is radically different from that of all eight other nuclear weapons states. Chronologically, Israel was the sixth country in the world to develop and ultimately possess nuclear weapons, and the only state in the Middle East to have done so thus far. It is distinctive, however, in never having acknowledged its weapons status. Unlike all other nuclear states, which have made public their nuclear status by conducting a nuclear test and subsequently issuing a political statement, Israel neither confirms nor denies its possession of atomic weapons. This policy, commonly referred to as one of "nuclear opacity" (in Hebrew, *amimut*), is arguably the country's most distinct contribution to the nuclear age. This chapter aims to trace Israel's nuclear history and its distinct profile as an undeclared nuclear weapons state in a way that links the two themes.

Israel first initiated its nuclear program in the late 1950s and managed within a single decade – through its own ingenuity and with outside help – to reach and cross the weapons threshold. Today, Israel is considered an advanced nuclear weapon state, both in terms of the quality and the quantity of its arsenal, estimates of which range from 80 warheads to as many as 300.¹

In 1966, then Prime Minister Levi Eshkol was the first to publicly pledge "Israel will not be the first nation to introduce nuclear weapons to the Middle East"; each of his nine successors has prudently abided by that policy formula. (Incidentally, in recent years Israeli prime ministers are no longer confronted with the anachronistic question as to whether or not Israel is in possession of nuclear weapons). Decades later, Netanyahu's tongue-in-cheek warning notwithstanding, opacity is firmly entrenched in Israel's national security posture – so much so that most Israelis view it as both necessary and successful, without pausing to realize how unique and arguably undemocratic that policy may be. For this very reason, the chapter ends by raising fundamental questions to assess the value of this hidden dimension of Israel's security. What is the contribution of Israel's nuclear program to Israel's security? Are nuclear weapons still Israel's weapons of last resort? Does Israel today even warrant weapons of last resort?

Israel's nuclear diplomacy

A composite Israeli view on nuclear diplomacy is a mix of skepticism, instrumentalism, lip service and at times even cynicism. This is because Israel's nuclear commitment is first, and foremost, to shield and support its opaque nuclear posture, which is often inconsistent with diplomatic nuclear initiatives or controls. For Israelis, nuclear diplomacy is at best cosmetic, at worse a nuisance.

The general Israeli attitude is to treat with a grain of salt all forms of international diplomatic initiatives in the nuclear arena, be they legal treaties, multilateral agreements, disarmament fora, public diplomacy or nonproliferation norms such as transparency. With this in mind, we should pause to consider Israel's official position toward both (a) the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and (b) the vision of a Middle East Nuclear Weapons Free Zone (MENWFZ).

- (a) On the NPT issue, Israel initially had been circumspect. Only months after Prime Minister Golda Meir reached the so-called opacity bargain in 1969 with President Richard Nixon did

Israel, as I discuss later, ultimately inform the US it had no intention of signing the Treaty. While steadfastly resisting subsequent calls to sign and formally ratify the Treaty, it has nevertheless studiously refrained from repudiating it. Thus, for decades Israel, as a free rider, has enjoyed the benefits of the NPT in imposing restraints on Iraq and Iran without being a member, while also being effectively shielded by the US from external pressure.²

- (b) Anti-nuclear groups in Israel have raised and promoted the idea of a NWFZ in the Middle East since the early 1960s. Later, in 1980, following proposals by Egypt and Iran, Israel supported non-binding NWFZ resolutions at the UN General Assembly for reasons of public diplomacy: given Israel's rejection of the universalist-based NPT, a favorable endorsement of the NWFZ's regional approach allowed Israel to project a favorable image but without compromising opacity.

The way that Israel frames its MENWFZ vision does not require conceding anything tangible at any time soon (and according to some wags not until the Messiah arrives). Besides which, behind apparent agreement on the NWFZ vision, the many prospective Middle East parties to any such pact fundamentally disagree on the specific conditions and modalities under which any such NWFZ vision could be implemented, thereby sparing Israel from any formal commitment.³

In 1991, at the post-Gulf War Madrid Peace Conference, the United States and Russia co-sponsored the establishment of a multilateral working group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS). Initially, ACRS created a novel dialogue among parties who hardly ever talked about common security. Within two years, however, sharp differences of opinion on the specific and highly sensitive nuclear issue stalled these multilateral deliberations.⁴

Next, in 1995, the NPT Review Conference – which Israel did not attend – adopted a resolution calling upon all states in the region to accede to the NPT and to place their nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. The following year, on 25 September 1996, Israel did sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) – largely because, again, Jerusalem did not view it as incompatible with opacity. However, Israel has continued to leave it unratified.

Conversely, in August 1998, Israel refused to join the consensus at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) to allow starting negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT). Given the consensus rule procedurally adopted at the CD, Israel, in effect, singlehandedly derailed the FMCT precisely because the FMCT is incompatible with Israel's opacity. Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu stated at the time, “we will never sign the [FMCT] treaty, and do not delude yourselves – no pressure will help.”⁵

Most recently, in the last decade Israel's focus on the Iranian nuclear issue has lessened further its interest to engage in regional nuclear diplomacy, other than as diplomatic lip service. Hence, it has proven consistently reluctant to do so. The 2010 NPT Review Conference's final document singled out “the importance of Israel's accession to the Treaty.” But that remains only a pious wish. In order to implement the 1995 Resolution on the Middle East, the UN Secretary-General and co-sponsors of the 1995 Resolution were requested to convene a regional conference in 2012 on the establishment of a Middle East zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.⁶ Subsequently, a Finnish senior diplomat, Jaakko Laajava, was selected as conference facilitator, and Finland named prospective host country for the conference.⁷

Ultimately, however, because Israel so strenuously opposed the forum (which it believed to be directed against it), the US Government under President Barack Obama announced in November 2012 the conference's indefinite postponement.⁸ Not being an NPT signatory, Israel's opposition was two-fold. It objected to any linking of the regional conference to NPT diplomacy; also to

any linkage between the issue of MEWMDFZ and peaceful resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict.⁹

What could possibly make such dogged commitment to a nuclear policy of opaqueness worth the price of international censure? The answer lies in the policy’s historical origins and political evolution from denial to ambiguity and from ambiguity to opacity. A secondary factor calls our attention to how deeply institutionalized, codified and accepted this traditional policy is within government circles, endorsed by virtually all the defense establishment and security community and applauded by an uninformed and therefore possibly unthinking public as providing the ultimate safeguard for the continued survival of the Jewish State.

The original motivation: the father–founder and his lieutenants

The fascinating chronology of Israel’s going nuclear is closely documented elsewhere.¹⁰ Briefly recapitulated, Israel’s nuclear ambitions are as old as the state itself. The visionary father–founder of the country’s nuclear program was its first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, who, from 1955 until resigning in 1963, presided over its conversion from abstract hope to technological reality. Unlike most Israelis, who celebrated after Israel’s War of Independence in 1948, Ben-Gurion viewed that victory more soberly: as evidence of the Arabs’ political and military weaknesses rather than Israel’s fighting capabilities. For him, cessation of hostilities was a temporary pause until the Arabs could regroup for another round. Indeed, Ben-Gurion never ceased fearing that Israel’s security predicament was precarious and uncertain.

This realistic outlook was supported by other pillars in Ben-Gurion’s *Weltanschauung*. For one thing, he had limited confidence in Israel’s small conventional army, the IDF, many of whose recruits were new immigrants and poorly educated. Moreover, while hardly talking about it in public, the Holocaust trauma colored Ben-Gurion’s entire worldview.¹¹

While population, geography and resources, the fundamental geopolitical asymmetries of the Arab–Israeli conflict, were decidedly in the Arabs’ favor, Ben-Gurion, as Shimon Peres once articulated it, “believed that science could compensate us for what Nature has denied us.”¹² Acquisition of the atomic bomb would transform the entire Arab–Israeli conflict and assure Israel’s survival as an island in a hostile region. In the longer-term, its possession might even make possible Arab–Israeli reconciliation. Worth recalling is that all these considerations were made against the geopolitical background of pre-1967 Israel.

The year 1955 is the turning point in Israel’s nuclear pursuit. As part of Ben-Gurion’s newly declared “self-reliance” doctrine that “the future of Israel will not be dependent on what the Gentiles say but on what the Jews do,” he upgraded nuclear pursuit to the top of his agenda. That year was also a turning point for the spread of civilian nuclear energy. In July, less than two years after President Eisenhower’s “Atoms for Peace” initiative called for the spread of peaceful nuclear technology, Israel signed a bilateral nuclear cooperation agreement with the United States for receiving a small research reactor. Soon, however, senior Israelis recognized that American nuclear assistance was both too limited and too constraining for their lofty ambitions. Peres, then the director general of the Ministry of Defense who was charged with advancing the clandestine nuclear project, argued that rather than “reinventing the wheel,” Israel turn to France, a country some of whose own national interests converged with those of Israel, and which might therefore relieve Israel’s search for a foreign supplier.

Following Egypt’s unilateral nationalization of the Suez Canal Company in the summer of

1956, Peres redoubled his efforts in Paris. After almost a year of negotiations, he successfully signed an ambitious secret nuclear deal consisting of a set of secret technical and political agreements,¹³ which enabled construction of the complex to begin under secrecy in mid-1958 near the southern town of Dimona.

Instructively, when French President Charles De Gaulle informed Ben-Gurion in June 1960 of his decision to end the Franco–Israeli collaboration, Israel resourcefully continued to receive assistance from private companies. Israel also sought and received critical assistance from others. Norway, for example, agreed to provide Israel with the heavy water necessary for the Dimona reactor, and in 1960 repurchased 20 tons of heavy water originally sold to the United Kingdom, exporting it directly from British ports to Israel.

The American factor: from denial to ambiguity

If France is the country that initially enabled Israel to go nuclear secretly, the United States is the superpower whose response to Israel’s nuclear program greatly shaped the way Israel stumbled into opacity. By 1956 Israel recognized that the United States would oppose Israeli nuclear ambitions, hence the imperative for secrecy over the Dimona project. Only as of November 1960 did the CIA finally conclude that Israel was secretly building a major nuclear complex, leading the Eisenhower Administration to ask for clarifications. In response, on December 23, Ben-Gurion publicly informed the *Knesset* that a 24 MWt research reactor “was under construction and was expected to lead Israel towards the age of nuclear power,” yet denied any military or security dimension.¹⁴

President John F. Kennedy, in making nonproliferation a priority, took Israel as an important test case and insisted the US have access to the Negev site to verify Israel’s peaceful claims.¹⁵ Upon meeting the President, Ben-Gurion reiterated that the Dimona project was peaceful, but qualified this by adding “for the time being.”

In the spring and summer of 1963, with construction at Dimona nearing completion, Kennedy renewed his pressure in a series of tough letters demanding regular bi-annual American inspections and threatening non-compliance would “seriously jeopardize” US–Israel relations. After weeks of consultations, Levi Eshkol, Ben-Gurion’s successor, agreed finally to annual American visits, the first taking place in January 1964. In practice, however, Israel managed to control the terms of the visits.

It was also in early April 1963, in an improvised meeting with President Kennedy at the White House, that Shimon Peres first invoked the formula by which “Israel will not be the first to introduce nuclear weapons.” As retold years later, this was a pure improvisation made on the spot to escape Kennedy’s unexpected and intrusive questioning. What is important here is that Eshkol adopted the same ambiguous formulation in his first summit meeting with President Lyndon Johnson in June 1964; in March 1965, the same pledge was inserted into a bilateral memorandum of understanding. By May 1966, Eshkol could also inform the *Knesset* that Israel possessed no nuclear weapons ... but that it would also not be the first to introduce such weapons to the region.

By way of interim summary, as of 1966 these statements were understood to equate “non-introduction” with “non-possession” and by implication with “non-testing.” While still pledging “non-introduction,” Israel completed most of the R&D phase for producing its first nuclear device by early 1967. Yet Eshkol still hesitated on how far Israel should go in its weaponization

efforts.

Crossing the nuclear threshold: doctrine, alerts, military utility

Seeking greater clarity in rationalizing the program, Eshkol quietly tasked prominent defense thinkers in 1966 with drafting and articulating a strategic nuclear doctrine. While not necessarily sharing Ben-Gurion's original anxieties, the panelists did not question Israel's duty to prepare itself for worst-case scenarios prompted by an abrupt and dramatic deterioration in Israel's basic security. These discussions reinforced Ben-Gurion's intuitive rationale for nuclear weapons by defining concrete "red lines" whose crossing could compel triggering the resort to nuclear weapons in any of four very specific situations:¹⁶

- a) Arab military penetration into populated areas within Israel's 1949 cease-fire lines;
- b) Destruction of the Israeli Air Force;
- c) Exposure of Israeli cities to massive air attack or to possible chemical and biological weapons;
- d) Nuclear weapons launched against Israeli territory and people.

Starkly defined in qualitative terms as posing an existential threat to the very existence and sustainability of the State of Israel, and against which the country could defend itself by no means other than employing atomic weapons, each of these scenarios both morally and politically justified crossing the threshold as a last resort and pressing the nuclear button.

Already then, in 1966, however, a strategic counter-argument and a strategic dilemma enter the equation. To use the bomb as a last resort when, for instance, Arab armies may have already invaded, could be too late, and thus *militarily* unacceptable; to use the bomb in a preemptive mode might be deemed too early, and thus *politically* unacceptable. Consequently, Israeli strategists live with the real-world challenge of identifying the precise and appropriate moment to exercise the nuclear option.

Thus far there have been three occasions on which Israeli strategists considered resorting to the use of nuclear weapons. The first came in May 1967, when the Egyptian-prompted Middle East crisis abruptly ended Israeli thinking about the unthinkable in hypothetical terms. Momentarily, the acute situation appeared to turn Ben-Gurion's worst fears into a reality, and under the circumstances made the project's directors rush with utmost speed towards the threshold. By late May, crash completion of the assembly of Israel's first nuclear devices took place, not because of a political or strategic directive from the top but rather as a spontaneous response to the unanticipated crisis.¹⁷ Thus, the events of May 1967 mark the real point in time when Israel emerges as a nuclear power.

The second instance when Israel came close to activating its invisible nuclear device occurred immediately after the traumatic and nearly catastrophic outbreak of the 1973 Yom Kippur War. On 7 October, to their utter and complete surprise Israelis found themselves under concerted attack, with the Egyptian army crossing the Suez Canal into the Sinai Peninsula and possibly moving toward Israel proper from the south, and the Syrians penetrating deep into the Golan Heights, poised within possibly hours to invade from the north.

According to reliable testimony, in those desperate hours Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, expressing fear that Israel was on the brink of "the destruction of the Third Temple," urged

Prime Minister Golda Meir to order the highest state of nuclear readiness.¹⁸ Ultimately, the IDF succeeded in blocking both advances, obviating the need to pursue the Domsday scenario to its grim conclusion.

The third occasion on which Israel alerted its nuclear forces was during the 1991 Persian Gulf War, when Israel reportedly may have considered a nuclear warning and response in the event of Iraq's unleashing weapons of mass destruction, specifically chemical and biological weapons. Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir issued veiled nuclear threats toward Iraq, in stating: "all those who threaten us should know that whoever dares strike Israel will be struck hard and in the most severe way," adding for emphasis: "Israel has a very strong deterrent capability."¹⁹

In retrospect, all three red alerts reinforced the conclusion Israeli strategists had arrived at already in 1966. Nuclear weapons are unlike any other type of weapon, especially given the extreme difficulty in finding their application either militarily prudent or morally justifiable.²⁰

Opacity entrenched

While Israel crossed the nuclear threshold in May 1967, neither the Israeli public nor the outside world were privy to the drama as it unfolded. Owing to America's silent and somewhat reluctant acquiescence in Israel's interpretation of the "non-introduction" pledge as a self-imposed prohibition against any nuclear public acts, such as a declaration or a nuclear test, and not about nuclear possession, Israel was able to go nuclear invisibly.²¹ The private White House meeting on September 26, 1969 between Prime Minister Golda Meir and President Richard Nixon cemented it into a tacit bilateral agreement.

Although no written record of the meeting is available, it is believed Mrs. Meir confided Israel did indeed have nuclear weapons but was committed to keeping them hidden "in the basement," i.e., undeclared, untested, invisible. A bargain was struck, whereby Israel would continue to adhere to its "non-introduction" pledge in return for America looking the other way, canceling annual visits to the Dimona nuclear facility and no longer pressuring Israel to sign the NPT.²²

Opacity is justifiably regarded by Israelis as a major strategic success. On the one hand, it closed a decade of American-Israeli confrontation and pressure over Israel's nuclear program, marked by a chain of denial and inspections, deception and concealment, ambiguity, duplicity and pressure. On the other hand, the understanding inaugurated a symbiotic regime of nuclear opacity assigning Israel the privileged status of an undeclared *de facto* nuclear power with a nuclear deterrence capability at almost no political cost.

In the coming decades, Israel worked to expand and improve its nuclear arsenal quantitatively and qualitatively, taking full advantage of its newly acquired freedom of action under opacity. Illustrating the trade-off, by the late 1970s Israel was reputed to have attained a two-stage (thermonuclear) capability,²³ while also restraining itself in the Yom Kippur War and afterwards deciding not to develop tactical nuclear weapons.

The Begin doctrine and its legacy: from Osirak to Natanz

In the years since the Meir-Nixon bargain, Israeli Governments have pursued a two-pronged nuclear strategy aimed at maintaining an undeclared nuclear monopoly. One priority is to persevere in upgrading its own deterrent nuclear arsenal while at the same time insisting on

preventive measures against military nuclear programs by other Middle Eastern actors.

On the former issue, responding to technological advances and to Iran's bellicose posture, Israel proceeded to develop a new sea-based second-strike capability, symbolized over the last two decades by procuring and deploying five German-built, diesel-powered Dolphin-class submarines, with more on order.²⁴ As a direct result of these efforts, Israel today possesses a nuclear triad comprising its Jericho ballistic missile system, modified fighter jets and sea-going fleet.²⁵

Complementing opacity in seeing to its own nuclear preparedness, Israel also pursues an aggressive policy aimed at blocking acquisition of nuclear weapons capabilities by any rival Middle East actor. This policy, commonly referred to as the "Begin Doctrine," when combined with opacity, signals Israel's determination to maintain its existing nuclear monopoly in the region.²⁶

This policy has antecedents in the early 1960s against Nasserist Egypt's covert attempt at employing former Nazi German scientists. Still, it was first fully exercised and highlighted internationally only on June 7, 1981, when Israeli aircraft successfully carried out an operationally daring and complex preemptive strike code-named "Operation Opera" against Iraq's Osirak reactor. Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the air strike's prime mover, insisted the nearly completed Iraqi installation was designed with weapons in mind, thereby qualifying the depiction of the strike as preemptive and designed to avert a future peril of high probability. He declared the attack "a precedent for every future government in Israel."²⁷

With the benefit of hindsight, the contemporary consensus is that Begin may have been wrong in his judgment and that the Osirak reactor posed neither a short- nor mid-term peril for Israel. Moreover, we now know that within three months of the strike, Iraq secretly reinstated its nuclear program, this time on a more ambitious scale, literally and metaphorically taking it underground, a move Israeli intelligence failed to detect.²⁸ This historical insight has never been fully absorbed by the Israeli security establishment, who continue to cite Osirak as the crowning success of the Begin Doctrine.

On September 6, 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was the second to apply the Begin Doctrine in ordering a preventive air strike, subsequently known as "Operation Orchard," against a Syrian facility believed to be a nearly operational plutonium-producing nuclear reactor near Al-Kibar, built with North Korea's assistance.²⁹ Once top-level consultations with the Bush Administration indicated US unwillingness to take military action, the IDF again acted unilaterally against the Syrian facility,³⁰ but in sharp contrast to the 1981 raid, the 2007 air strike did not elicit an international outcry. For one thing, Israel did not immediately take public responsibility for the attack, which even Syria only vaguely acknowledged had occurred.³¹ Some have suggested the international silence may have been tacit recognition of the inevitability of preemptive attacks on "clandestine nuclear programs in their early stages."³²

We now arrive at the most difficult test case for the Begin Doctrine: Iran. For well over a decade now, assessing the Iranian nuclear threat, and how Israel might best avert it, has dominated Israel's national agenda. This author is convinced that the Iranian issue is for Israel less about security *per se* – and whether Iran would actually attack Israel with nuclear weapons – than it is about a threat to Israel's nuclear monopoly. It is this monopoly Prime Minister Netanyahu is committed to safeguarding – possibly even by going to war. Yet, remarkably, this framing of the Iranian issue has hardly echoed in Israel, largely due to the effect of opacity on domestic politics and discourse.

Under Prime Ministers Ariel Sharon (2001–2006) and Ehud Olmert (2006–2009), Iran’s nuclearization was handled with as much circumspection as determination. Under Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu (2009–), Iran and the bomb became Israel’s number one strategic security concern.³³ Referring to the specter of a nuclear Iran as threatening the existence of Israel,³⁴ Netanyahu projected the willingness to strike against Iran were it to cross certain red lines (never fully and publicly specified). On at least one occasion, in 2011, he and of Defense Minister Ehud Barak were reportedly at the point of issuing an alert directive for a strike countdown but had to abort the plan due to the strong opposition expressed by their security chiefs.³⁵

We still do not know what Netanyahu’s real intentions were, leaving us – and Iran – to speculate over whether he conducted a calculated bluffing exercise directed at forcing stronger international pressure against Iran, or was truly ready to risk an escalating and unprecedented missile war with Iran, mixed quite possibly with a proxy war waged by *Hizbullah* and *Hamas*. Proponents of the latter force approach insist that the consequences of a nuclear Iran – including an adverse shift in the balance of power and further proliferation in the Middle East – would be worse than inaction.³⁶ The counter-argument for prudence, and against preemptive military action, advocates the wisdom of first exhausting diplomatic channels and other covert means. Besides which, an attack would only engender greater support for the Iranian regime, would “clearly delay, but probably not destroy, Iran’s nuclear program”³⁷ and, if anything, only accelerate its efforts to develop yet a second Islamic bomb (i.e., in addition to Pakistan’s).³⁸

Epilogue: towards an historical reassessment

In today’s world, Ben-Gurion’s post-1948 nightmares are no longer feasible, militarily or politically. Under no plausible military scenario may Israel need nuclear weapons as a “last resort” against a concerted all-Arab conventional attack. The 1973 Yom Kippur War surely represents the last conventional war of its kind.

While the future is always uncertain, most observers agree there is no short- or mid-term threat to Israel’s Middle East nuclear monopoly. Netanyahu is the only Israeli leader who equates Iran with Nazi Germany, and despite his ever-present concern about a future nuclearized Iran, the fact is that Israel now faces no such existential nuclear threat.

To be sure, as of this writing the future of the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is uncertain. However, that uncertainty is not because Iran has violated the terms of the agreement but rather because the Trump Administration has announced the USA’s withdrawal from it. Were the JCPOA regime to collapse, no one can predict what could happen. So, too, longer-term concerns are warranted over civilian nuclear programs launched by other Middle Eastern counties, led by Saudi Arabia, which could one day be converted for nuclear weapons’ production. Yet such developments are at least a decade away.³⁹

Domestically, one of the damaging consequences of nuclear opacity is the poverty, indeed, complete absence of serious public discourse on the value of the nation’s nuclear investment. Over the lifetime of the Israeli nuclear program, Israel clearly has invested what seem to be disproportionately huge funds to build this multifaceted enterprise. By rough (but cautious) estimate, this overall expense could easily be several hundreds of billions of shekels.

Has this investment paid off in terms of Israel’s security? If so, in which ways? Questions such as these are hardly discussed – let alone debated – by the Israeli public. Neither are possible balance sheets provided in testimonies by the enterprise’s leaders and architects or by outside

academics.

In the absence of factual data, expert analysis or scholarly research, most Israelis, including security experts, automatically *assume* that Israel's nuclear enterprise has proven, unequivocally, to be both worthwhile and successful. After all, Israel has established an extraordinary nuclear national insurance policy safeguarded quietly and cautiously, and with tacit American support. No less impressive is the fact that Israel maintains a strong but undeclared regional nuclear monopoly. What could it be more astute or more successful than this?

While that evaluation may generally be true, strong national support for the nuclear program cannot substitute for a candid, rigorous security assessment of the nuclear issue: of costs and benefits, gains and losses. The first condition for such a sober and critical debate is a prior and open acknowledgement that Israel is indeed a nuclear weapons state. The second is to fortify the discussion with basic certifiable information which, even if not copious is certifiable. Herein lies the essence of the problem. Precisely because *acknowledgement* is incompatible with the established policy of opacity, or with the culture of nuclear taboo, it renders any such discussion, practically speaking, unfeasible.

While legal, political and bureaucratic restrictions exclude practitioners from discussing those matters, they do not and should not prevent Israeli academics from posing the relevant questions. Yet this has not been the case.

This chapter therefore concludes by raising a cluster of key questions on the balance sheet of Israel's nuclear project.

- **Role in Israel's security:** How to conceptualize the net asset – the security significance – of Israel's nuclear enterprise? Should we think of it in terms of *military* capabilities? Or rather in *political* terms?

This author is convinced, based on the discussion above, that at present the nuclear dimension of Israel security is largely political, and hardly military. It is no longer about “last resort” weapons; it is more about a “national insurance policy” against an unknown future.

- **The role of the nuclear issue in diminishing the Arab–Israeli conflict:** Has the existence of an Israeli bomb contributed to the cause of peace, starting with Egypt, and ultimately to lowering the intensity of the Arab–Israeli conflict?

The author believes Israel's nuclear deterrence program and reputation did play a significant role in Arab acceptance of Israel after 1973, especially in the 1979 peace treaty with Egypt.

- **The bomb's impact on Israel's foreign policy:** Has Israeli diplomatic behavior become more assertive, indeed more aggressive because of its regional nuclear monopoly?

In the author's opinion, Israel's nuclear monopoly in the region has contributed over time to making Israel's foreign policy more power-based as well as more assertive.

- **The bomb and the Palestinian issue:** More specifically, has the bomb contributed to Israel's adopting a more assertive, indeed more aggressive posture toward the Palestinians?

Here, too, it is my opinion that Israel's exclusive nuclear status and image do play a role, albeit tacitly and indirectly, in Israel's hardline policies toward the Palestinians, especially in recent years, and especially under and throughout the leadership of Prime Minister Netanyahu.

- **The future of nuclear opacity?** Should opacity continue indefinitely? Both as a policy and as a culture, is it the necessary and also appropriate mechanism for governing Israel's nuclear affairs? Is opacity truly indispensable for Israel's national security? Does it really provide Israel with the political cover it needs for retaining its nuclear capabilities? Conversely, if opacity is dispensable, then how might it be phased out?

In closing, I believe that while opacity was once indispensable for Israel's national security and deterrent capability, this is no longer the case. It must be borne in mind that opacity has negative and serious domestic anti-democratic consequences. Both Israeli leaders – and the Israeli public – would benefit by exploring ways to relax and ultimately terminate opacity. As part of this process, it is high time for Israeli academics to start debating these fundamental questions.

Notes

- 1 Nobody really knows the details of Israel's nuclear arsenal. For a discussion of the various estimates proffered as to the number of nuclear warheads in Israel's possession, see: Avner Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret: Israel's Bargain with the Bomb*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010, p. xxviii. Subsequent discussions in Hans M. Kristensen and Robert S. Norris, "Nuclear Notebook," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 70, no. 6 (2014): 97–115 and the same authors' "Worldwide Deployments of Nuclear Weapons," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 73, no. 5 (2017).
- 2 On the details of Israel's response to the challenge of the NPT see: Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988, pp. 293–321 and *The Worst-Kept Secret*, pp. 1–33.
- 3 On the related issues of MENWFZ and MEWMDFZ see: Arms Control Association (Facts Sheets and Briefs), "WMD-Free Middle East Proposal at a Glance." www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/mewmdfz; Patricia M. Lewis, "A Middle East Free of Nuclear Weapons: Possible, Probable or Pipe-Dream?," *International Affairs* 89 (2013): 433–450; Patricia M. Lewis and William Potter, "The Long Journey Toward a WMD-Free Middle East," *Arms Control Today* 41 (2011): 8–14.
- 4 "Arms control and regional security in the middle east (ACRS)". *The Nuclear Threat Initiative*. October 26, 2011. See: www.nti.org/learn/treaties-and-regimes/arms-control-and-regional-security-middle-east-acrs.
- 5 Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret*, p. 233.
- 6 "2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," Final Document, Volume I, NPT/CONF/2010/50 (2010); William Potter, Patricia Lewis, Gaukhar Mukhatzhanova and Miles Pomper, "The 2010 NPT Review Conference: Deconstructing Consensus," *James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies*, June 17, 2010. www.nonproliferation.org.
- 7 Report of the Facilitator to the First Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," NPT/CONF.2015/PC.I/11, May 8, 2012.
- 8 "2012 Conference on a Middle East Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction (MEWMDFZ)," press release, US Department of State, November 23, 2012. www.state.gov.
- 9 "NPT Briefings: 2010 & Beyond; Middle East Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone: The Need for Practical Regional and International Approaches," *The Acronym Institute for Disarmament Diplomacy*. www.acronym.org.uk.
- 10 Narrating Israel's nuclear history is still a tricky academic exercise, inevitably limited by Israel's policy of nuclear opacity. I primarily rely here on my own past research, detailed in both *Israel and the Bomb* (1998) and *The Worst-Kept Secret* (2010) as well as the Electronic Briefing Books I posted at the "Nuclear Vault" of the National Security Archive, supplemented by new material and sources that have become available in recent years.
- 11 On several occasions, Ben-Gurion compared Nasser and Hitler, invoking the idea of the possibility "of a new Holocaust against the Jewish people in this country." Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, p. 12.
- 12 Shimon Peres, *Battling for Peace: A Memoir*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995, p. 132.
- 13 Michael Bar-Zohar, *Shimon Peres: The Biography*. New York: Random House, 2007, pp. 216–17; Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, p. 59.
- 14 Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, p. 91. This would remain the only occasion an Israeli prime minister has ever spoken publicly about the purpose of the Dimona reactor.
- 15 The following paragraphs are based on Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, pp. 108–239.
- 16 Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, pp. 235–239.
- 17 Avner Cohen, "The 1967 Six-Day War," June 3, 2017. www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-1967-six-day-war.
- 18 Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret*, pp. 80–8. See also Elbridge Colby and Avner Cohen et al., "The Israeli 'Nuclear Alert' of 1973: Deterrence and Signaling in Crisis," DRM-2013-U-004480-Final, April 2013, CNS Publication. www.cna.org/CNA_files/PDF/DRM-2013-U-004480-Final.pdf.
- 19 Bob Hepburn, "Israel on Full Alert After Iraqi Threat," *The Toronto Star*, December 26, 1990.

- 20 I enlarge on this argument in: “Nuclear Arms in Crisis Under Secrecy: Israel and the 1967 and 1973 Wars,” in: Peter Lavoy et al. (eds.) *Planning the Unthinkable: How New Powers Will Use Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000, pp. 104–124.
- 21 Some claim that Israel broke its pledge and did test a nuclear device in the dawn hours of September 22, 1979, in the South Atlantic, somewhere half way between South Africa and Antarctica. This view attributes to Israel the mysterious “double flash” that was then detected by a US VELA satellite. True or not, what is important for the sake of our argument here about Israel’s opacity is that no state has ever adopted this narrative and attributed the South Atlantic double flash to Israel. Israel has never faced the charge that it violated its obligation under the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) because no state has ever presented “proof” that Israel did so. Hence, opacity seems to have worked. For the most recent collection of documents and introductory article on this issue, see William Burr and Avner Cohen, “The Vela Incident: South Atlantic Mystery Flash in September 1979 Raised Questions about Nuclear Test,” *Electronic Briefing Book (EBB)*, December 6, 2016, p. 570. <https://nsarchive.gwu.edu/briefing-book/nuclear-vault/2016-12-06/vela-incident-south-atlantic-mystery-flash-september-1979>.
- 22 Cohen, *The Worst-Kept Secret*, pp. 23–33.
- 23 Ibid., p. 82.
- 24 See, most recently: Victor Gilinsky, “Israel’s Sea-Based Nukes Pose Risks,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, On-Line, February 8, 2016. <https://thebulletin.org/israel%E2%80%99s-sea-based-nukes-pose-risks9151>; Kyle Mizokami, “Israel Has a Submarine That Could Destroy Entire Nations (Armed With Nuclear Weapons),” *The National Interest*, December 6, 2017. <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/israel-has-submarine-could-destroy-entire-nations-armed-23520>.
- 25 Robert S. Norris et al., “Israeli Nuclear Forces, 2002,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 58, no. 5 (September/October 2002).
- 26 Amos Yadlin, “The Begin Doctrine: The Lessons of Osirak and Deir ez-Zor,” *INSS Insight No. 1037*, March 21, 2018. www.inss.org.il/publication/the-begin-doctrine-the-lessons-of-osirak-and-deir-ez-zor/
- 27 “CBS News: An Interview With Prime Minister Menachem Begin,” *Face the Nation*, CBS, June 15, 1981 in Leonard S. Spector and Avner Cohen, “Israel’s Airstrike on Syria’s Reactor: Implications for the Nonproliferation Regime,” *Arms Control Today*, July/August 2008. www.armscontrol.org.
- 28 “Fourth Consolidated Report of the Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency Under Paragraph 16 of Security Council Resolution 1051 (1996),” United Nations Security Council, S/1997/779, October 8, 1997. www.iaea.org. Also Malfrid Braut-Hegghammer, *Unclear Physics: Why Iraq and Libya Failed to Build Nuclear Weapons*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016, pp. 46–102.
- 29 In March 2018, a decade after the event, Israel finally took full responsibility for this operation. See; Amos Harel and Aluf Benn, “No Longer a Secret: How Israel Destroyed Syria’s Nuclear Reactor,” *Ha’aretz*, March 23, 2018. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/MAGAZINE-no-longer-a-secret-how-israel-destroyed-syria-s-nuclear-reactor-1.5914407.
- 30 Dan Raviv and Yossi Melman, *Spies Against Armageddon: Inside Israel’s Secret Wars*. Sea Cliff, NY: Levant Books, 2012, pp. 317–319.
- 31 In fact, Syria covered up its nuclear activities at the site, denying that the target was an illicit reactor. Nonetheless, the IAEA concluded in 2011 the destroyed building was “very likely a nuclear reactor.” IAEA, “Implementation of the NPT Safeguards Agreement in the Syrian Arab Republic,” Report by the Director General to the Board of Governors, GOV/2011/30, May 24, 2011.
- 32 Leonard S. Spector and Avner Cohen, “Israel’s Airstrike on Syria’s Reactor: Implications for the Nonproliferation Regime,” *Arms Control Today*, July/August 2008. www.armscontrol.org.
- 33 Leslie Susser, “Spy vs. Spy,” *Jerusalem Report*, March 7, 2012. www.jpost.com.
- 34 Jeffrey Goldberg, “Netanyahu to Obama: Stop Iran – Or I Will,” *The Atlantic*, March 2009. www.theatlantic.com; Ari Shavit, “A Grave Warning on Iran From ‘The Decision Maker’,” *Ha’aretz*, August 11, 2012. www.haaretz.com.
- 35 Barak Ravid et al., “Netanyahu Trying to Persuade Cabinet to Support Attack on Iran,” *Ha’aretz*, November 2, 2011. www.haaretz.com.
- 36 As former Defense Minister Ya’alon argued: “it is preferable to pay the steep price of war than to allow Iran to acquire military nuclear capability.” Goldberg, “Netanyahu to Obama.”
- 37 Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, “Media Roundtable at U.S. Embassy in London,” *Joint Chiefs of Staff*, August 30, 2012. www.jcs.mil.
- 38 Avner Cohen, “Israel’s Iran Dilemma,” *Ha’aretz*, December 2, 2011. www.haaretz.com.
- 39 James M. Dorsey, “The Middle East’s Nuclear Technology Clock Is Ticking,” *BESA Center Perspectives Paper No. 774*, March 20, 2018. <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/nuclear-technology-clock/>; Chuck Freilich, “The Middle East Is Marching Toward Israel’s Nuclear Nightmare Scenario,” *Ha’aretz*, March 1, 2018. www.haaretz.com/opinion/.premium-the-mideast-is-marching-towards-israel-s-nightmare-nuclear-scenario-1.5864113.

Part V

Augmenting security

Costs and benefits

23

Building resilience

The public discourse

Keren Friedman-Peleg

This chapter explores what promises to be a critical turning point in Israeli public discourse on national security. Today's integration of and extensive reference to psychological concepts such as "trauma" and "resilience" mark a significant departure from the disregard and stigmatization of mental health-related difficulties during the country's formative years. This development represents an innovative means of both conceptualizing and coping with existential threats stemming from the violent, seemingly unending political conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Furthermore, it indicates ways for dealing more effectively with threat situations in general.

This chapter analyzes how the social project of developing mental coping skills to alleviate emotional experiences of fear and anxiety has merged with the dominant Israeli ethos of nationalism, enmeshing itself in two contradictory yet hegemonic notions of "victimhood" and "aggression." This evolution will be traced by examining weekly updates published by the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC), a non-governmental aid agency operating since the second Palestinian *Intifada* and focusing on mental health.

In July 2014, the IDF began the military operation "Protective Edge" in the Gaza Strip. At that time, the Israel Trauma Coalition (ITC), a non-governmental aid agency focusing on mental health and operating in Israel since the beginning of the second Palestinian *Intifada*, began publishing regular updates regarding what it calls "the situation on the ground." Specializing in treating victims of security-related trauma and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), the ITC publishes its updates via emails, usually twice a week, to a server list of thousands of recipients both in Israel and outside of it, including leaders and members of Jewish Federations in North America. On August 24, 2014, for example, towards the end of the Israeli army's military operation in Gaza, the following information was circulated via the publication:

"The Gaza border communities are going through difficult days indeed, but we're in the midst of a campaign," said the Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon. "This campaign has diplomatic aspects, military aspects and one other important aspect – the citizen's resilience. It is not a coincidence the other side is trying to attack citizens. We will win in the end. This is a test of determination, of resilience, and a test for us as a society."¹

Elaborating on the Minister's remarks, mental health experts from the ITC volunteered, by way of explanation:

The resilience of Southern residents is at the core of ITC's work. [...] The needs for individual and group intervention and treatment keep rising at an unprecedented rate; most of the requests are for toddlers, the elderly, new immigrants and those with special needs. In the last 48hrs, the Southern Resilience Centers treated several people suffering from extreme anxiety. Sessions included relaxation techniques and self-care tools.

(ibid.)

This incident illustrates the emergence and diffusion of the psycho-social concept of "resilience" into the public discourse on national security in Israel. It also demonstrates that the professional work of Jewish-Israeli mental health experts is respected as an integral part of a collective effort aimed at maintaining the nation's staying power against Palestinian attempts at diminishing it.

While political leaders like Ya'alon address this task at the governmental level, ITC experts approach it using their professional tools. These include mapping "needs" (such as "high levels of anxiety") among especially vulnerable target groups (such as toddlers, the elderly, immigrants and those with special requirements), while providing diverse therapeutic answers (such as relaxation and self-care).

The socio-historical context: shifting perceptions of war's psychic toll

The ideological ambiance informing the perception of war and the military in Israel has had a decisive impact on the construction and presentation of Combat Stress Reaction (CSR) and its long-term sequel, PTSD. The pre-state Zionist reading of the precariousness of Jewish existence as a defenseless minority in the Diaspora, nightmarishly substantiated by the Holocaust, combined with the threats posed to Israel's existence during its formative years, gave birth to strong expectations for heroism among Israeli men.² Similarly, the consensus that the IDF was an indispensable safeguard of individual and national survival was a basic tenet of Israeli militarism. Against this ideological background, psychological vulnerability or collapse in battle would have deeply stigmatic effects.

This ideologically informed reluctance to acknowledge the possibility of a psychological breakdown among Israeli soldiers was the construct of the 1948 war, despite the imminent threat of destruction and high number of casualties, both physical and psychological. Psychological wounds were marginalized, a bias reinforced by poor medical administration and scarce psychiatric resources, which made it easy to ignore combat stress reactions altogether or to view them as stemming from "cowardice" or "lack of motivation." Men suffering from psychological wounds that could not be disregarded were treated in well-insulated psychiatric units, shrouded in secrecy, and were irrevocably released from service upon recovery. Those who remained traumatized found it difficult to secure official recognition as disabled war veterans.

Ambivalence toward psychological casualties became the more pronounced in the 1967 Six-Day War. A nascent military mental health system was already in existence when the war broke out, but the recognition threshold of combat stress reactions remained high. The dramatic

trajectory of the 1967 War – an alarming waiting period followed by a blitzkrieg which ended with overwhelming victory – created a climate of national euphoria that bolstered the national myth of heroism. Under these circumstances, combat stress reactions were marginalized once again.

The myth of heroism, and with it the disregard and denial that had hidden combat stress reactions from the public eye in the preceding wars, were significantly corroded in the 1973 War. Following the utter surprise and confusion at the onset of the war, the military defeats in the first days of fighting, and the heavy toll of casualties, the war became inscribed in the national consciousness as a massive trauma. The ensuing sense of disillusionment and vulnerability instilled in the Israeli public a stronger readiness to face the dire psychological consequences of the fighting. This readiness was only partially evident in the army. While the military mental health system was flooded by massive waves of psychological casualties, high-ranking officers were still entrenched in the belief that paying medical attention to these problems might amplify rather than attenuate them.

In the First Lebanon War (1982), a confluence of factors fostered the visibility of psychological breakdown in battle. The “de-glorification process” that has stained Israel’s wars since the 1970s. The heated controversy over the necessity, scope and outcome of the war. The extensive contact with a noncombatant population, and the introduction of PTSD to the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) (1980). Each has contributed to a growing awareness of psychological problems in battle and their long-term aftermath.³

The Palestinian uprisings in the Occupied Territories – the first in 1989 and the second in 2000 – while not escalating into full-fledged wars, have further sensitized public opinion in Israel to security-related trauma. Since then, the psychological cost of these two *Intifadas* has become an often-discussed subject in Israel’s public arenas: from the formal state political institutions and the media to artistic creations and professional conferences. Factors conducive to this process include not only, primarily, the widening circles of Israeli civilians caught up in the spiral of violence, but also the ongoing heated controversy regarding the moral justification for military control of the territories and for violent clashes with Palestinian civilians.⁴

The Second Lebanon War (2006) and the recent violent clashes in the Gaza Strip (2009 and 2012), have further amplified this process. Here too, large civilian populations on either side were exposed to the harmful effects of war. Local mental health experts thus have claimed that the heightened risk of developing the disorder required them to be much more involved in treating the mental fallout from the traumatic event at the level of large institutions, such as the educational system, municipalities and hospitals.⁵

The growing visibility of combatants’ psychic scars resonates with the aforementioned global ascent of trauma discourse and with what has become a thriving discourse of suffering and victimhood.⁶ On the local level, it is related to the changing image of the Israeli soldier, viewed today as more dependent and emotionally vulnerable. All of these changes, linked also with the weakening of the collectivist ethos and the myth of heroism, paved the road to a growing public awareness of and professional attention towards security-related traumatic and post-traumatic symptoms. This new approach has been based on the assumption that security-related post-traumatic stress symptoms merge the individual who has been diagnosed with the social context in which the harmful event occurred.⁷ “There is a feeling of mission, a feeling of collective, a feeling of state, society, community, place, family and of Judaism and roots” were the terms put to me by a Jewish-Israeli clinical psychologists from one of the NGOs that works under the wings of the ITC.⁸ Prof. Avi Bleich, a senior psychiatrist and a key figure in the field of security-

related trauma and PTSD, framed the uniqueness even more sharply:

A large part of its “impact” as trauma is that it comes from your being not just a person who lives here, [but also] an Israeli and a Jew. [...] All of these things carry within them, at least theoretically, unique characteristics of trauma, which are to some extent part of the Israeli-Jewish identity in the Land of Israel.⁹

This article’s examination of the contemporary diffusion of the notion of resilience into the public discourse on national security in Israel is based on ethnographic materials. Materials I collected and analyzed during my primary ethnographic research (2005–2009) at two Jewish-Israeli NGOs: NATAL (*The Israeli Center for Victims of Terror and War*, established in 1998), and ITC (*The Israeli Trauma Coalition*, established in 2001). Based on the network of connections I have created with key figures in both organizations, since then, I have visited the NGO offices quite often, attended annual and public events and been exposed to numerous professional texts. Therefore, in many ways, though occupying a lower profile than my initial ethnographic project, my fieldwork at NATAL and ITC has never ended. As part of this ongoing fieldwork, I have collected texts published by both NATAL and ITC and broadly circulated them. Those texts are, for example, ITC’s updates published during the IDF’s military operation “Protective Edge” (July–August 2014) in Gaza, and during the “Knife Intifada” (October 2015).

The concept of resilience: old roots, new implementations

Trauma, argued the medical anthropologist Tanya Luhrmann, is “the great psychiatric narrative of our era,”¹⁰ and the idea of building resilience is certainly the most persuasive counter-narrative in the mental health field. Understood mainly as the ability to identify internal and external strengths and develop coping skills in the face of adversity, resilience has been measured mainly through satisfactory performance after an individual has been exposed to factors that put this performance at risk.¹¹ At the same time, the rich literature on “social resilience”¹² usually refers to the “capacity of groups of people bound together in an organization, class, racial group, community, or nation to sustain and advance their well-being in the face of challenges to it.”¹³ A similarly rich literature on community-based intervention in Israel in particular, especially in the north of the country after the First and Second Lebanon wars,¹⁴ provides another indication of the emerging prevalence of resilience as a new component in coping with security threats.

Implementing the concept of resilience in contemporary Israel, however, as notably demonstrated by the ITC updates, has become not only a focused professional goal of mental health experts, but even more so a psycho-social project having clear implications on the country’s public discourse on national security. In 2008, after many discussions among municipal authorities, governmental agencies and trauma experts working in non-governmental organizations, “resilience centers” (*merkazei khossen*) were established in five locations in the southern periphery of Israel: Sdot Negev, Sha’ar Hanegev, Sderot, the Eshkol region and the coast of Ashkelon.¹⁵ These centers were a response to what was described as a “constant state of alert” resulting from the ongoing existential threat of rockets fired from the Gaza Strip by Palestinian militant groups, *Hamas* and *Islamic Jihad*. The trauma experts behind this process,

especially those from the umbrella NGO of the Israel Trauma Coalition, explained that the ongoing exposure to rocket fire and the repeated sound of the code red alert

made the population vulnerable in every aspect of their lives: at the level of mental strength and resilience, their feelings of personal safety and security, their employment status, the relationships between couples and between parents and their children, the level of focus and concentration of children in school.¹⁶

The experts went on to describe their aid program as an:

innovative psychosocial concept and model that combines a comprehensive clinical response to individual psycho-trauma and stress; team training and support to volunteers and professionals providing assistance and care to the population; and, most critical for Israel's homeland security, coordination of emergency response plans in partnership with local municipalities.

(ibid.)

They concluded that “all these elements are essential to building the individual and community resilience needed so that residents of Israel can go on with their lives with resolve and hope, despite the awareness that an alert can sound at any time” (ibid.).

The process of building resilience, therefore, which began as a focused professional task in specific geographical locations, has by now gained wide professional attention and public acceptance. What remains to be done here is to shed light on one aspect of this phenomenon. Namely, by introducing the concept of resilience, how are Jewish-Israeli mental health experts and political leaders changing the narrative regarding the appropriate way of conceptualizing and responding to security threats? A good part of the answer lies in the need to develop emotional, cognitive and behavioral skills as coping mechanisms.

“Building resilience” and the public discourse on national security

Three discursive practices gain prominence in this fairly recent notion of resilience. The first: mixing clinical concerns regarding traumatic and post-traumatic symptoms with snippets from the political dynamic between Israel and the Palestinians. The second: linkage between various social players based on their current and planned collaborations toward preventing PTSD and developing resilience among Israeli residents. The third: moving back and forth between an “emergency” mode and a mode of “daily routine.”

A rhetorical mix of clinical concerns with (parts of the) political reality

Mixing clinical concerns with bits and pieces of the political dynamic between Israel and the Palestinians is achieved by circulating different types of data, descriptions and testimonies. While the political dimension is accomplished by re-publishing media reports describing the military operations of the IDF, especially in Gaza, and citing remarks made by Israeli political

leaders, the clinical dimension is typically expressed using emotional terms such as “anxiety,” “anger,” “fear” or “stress,” and subsequent descriptions of the potential risk of developing post-traumatic symptoms. Interestingly, both dimensions are addressed using a common factor: numbers. While listing, in a strong expression of the political tone, the number of days of fighting, the number of rockets and number of wounded and dead on the Israeli side, the experts also provided a “victim portfolio.” This consisted of the numbers and percentages of those assumed to be diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic symptoms.

For example, on the very first day of the military operation “Protective Edge” (July 8, 2014), the ITC report commenced:

The IDF on Monday night announced the start of a military operation in Gaza Strip aimed at halting the rocket fire that has increasingly plagued Israel’s Southern communities in recent days. Militants in Gaza fired more than 85 rockets toward Israel on Monday evening alone. Military officials say approx. 200 rockets have been fired at Southern Israel since the start of the escalation. The rockets hit several major cities in the South and for the first time in the current fighting, caused alarms to go off in Central Israel and Jerusalem.¹⁷

Since this information had already circulated through media channels, its re-publication had nothing to do with “news” but was meant instead to frame the broader *political* context within which ITC experts sought to position their professional work.

This context was an aggressive attack on the Palestinian military organization’s treatment of innocent Israeli residents. This dynamic occurred not only in the south of the country, as already expected, but also in the center and in the capital city of Jerusalem.

Numbers have a significant role in sketching out the broader political context. One of the updates published during the recent “Knife Intifada,” to take one example, opens with the following statement: “Between October 1 and November 22, 2015, 19 people have been killed and 180 wounded, 21 seriously. There have been 67 stabbings, 9 shootings and 8 car rammings.”¹⁸

Alongside the frequent use of the quantitative power of numbers, the qualitative tool of personal testimonies is also implemented. In an update published towards the end of operation “Protective Edge” (August 21, 2014), immediately following the statement that “85% of the residents of Sderot (a town on the southern periphery of Israel) suffer from one or more posttraumatic symptoms,” the following description is included:

Twelve Bostonians visited yesterday [in Sderot] as part of a solidarity mission called “Stop the Sirens.” [...] Patricia, a 54-year-old grandmother is so badly scarred by the constant rockets that she has not left the basement of her home since early June, when *Hamas* began its recent round of attacks. She told the group from Boston that visited her in that basement: “This is the only place I feel safe.”

(ibid.)

Patricia’s painful testimony impacts powerfully given the circumstances within which she delivered it: the visit of a “solidarity mission” of 12 representatives from the Jewish community of Boston. Together, narrator and listeners established the appropriate context of respect for the experts and for their professionalism.

Worth noting is that as a rule the Daily Updates combine (a) their patriotic tone and (b) strong emphasis on framing the violent situation between Israel and the Palestinians through (c) the clinical labels of trauma and PTSD. This combination can be seen in the following ITC report of 8 July 2014:

As a result of the barrage of rocket fire the number of people needing direct care has already spiked over the past 48 hrs. To date as an example [...] in Eshkol 30 residents were treated for anxiety and over 40 requested for group therapy were received. In Hof Ashkelon 15 residents were treated for anxiety, in Sderot 30 were treated most of whom were young children and every day two trauma workshops are conducted in areas directly affected. [...] NATAL report a 350% increase (higher than during the Operation Pillar of Defensive), 67% from women, 25% from youth. Eran reports an increase of 115%, 6,000 calls, in a 24hr period alone, many from young children.¹⁹

In addition to sketching the wider political context within which they work, the experts use neutral, scientific concepts to describe the specific content of their activity. Under the general category “needing direct care,” they provide numbers and percentages of casualties. Case after case relates to those the clinical literature on trauma considers “at-risk groups”: young children, youth and women. When describing their professional response to those “in need,” the experts present several types of intervention, indicating their flexibility in response to the diverse experiences of vulnerability in certain arenas, including direct care, group intervention and hotlines.

As part of the ongoing effort to combine the political and clinical dimensions, on another Daily Update the ITC experts go on to describe how they had enlisted in the Israeli government’s battle over the public opinion regarding the military situation between Israel and the Palestinians:

ITC has been called upon to provide services in the realm of Hasbara [information] to many organizations and missions visiting Israel. Recently, at the behest of the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ITC’s director met with senior management from UNICEF International to explain the Israeli situation on the ground, particularly with regards to the effect of the conflict on the children, and provide some balance to the overall picture and information as presented by local Gaza UNICEF representatives. What was initially scheduled as a 20 min meeting with ITC (to be followed by an 8hr meeting in Gaza) led to a 3hr. [...] At the end of what was at times a very difficult encounter, the UNICEF representatives thanked ITC for giving them the opportunity to hear children’s stories, and said that they now had a greater understanding of the difficulties and acute anxiety of living for 14 years under fire.²⁰

ITC experts exploited their professional expertise to create symmetry between the situation in the Gaza Strip and that in the southern periphery of Israel. By providing UNICEF with solid statistical information about the mental condition of children in this area, the experts managed to create a deeper association with this international aid agency. The three hours eventually dedicated to the actual meeting (compared with the originally brief scheduled time of only 20 minutes and with the planned 8 hours in Gaza) were regarded as a success for the Israeli side, and thanks to ITC’s expertise.

De-contextualization, which omits the broader political situation in favor of a neutral “medical

reading” of the social dynamic, may be the more accepted practice elsewhere.²¹ Israeli mental health professionals, in contrast, incline more toward re-contextualization. Citing Israeli political leaders, providing statistics on the number and frequency of stabbing attacks or rocket fire, and employing the clinical labels of “trauma” and “PTSD” to articulate an array of distressing security-related experiences, they address head-on the stressful political atmosphere in which traumatic injuries occur as being directly relevant to their professional work.²²

Connecting the dots between diverse social players

ITC Daily Updates during “Protective Edge” also effectively express efforts at networking diverse institutional platforms – governmental and non-governmental, inside and outside the borders of Israel – around the shared aim of building up individual and collective national resilience. For example, in the face of yet another cycle of violence between Israel and the Palestinians in the summer of 2014, the ITC boasted

years of investment in establishing partnership in the field based on mutual trust and recognition paid dividends. ITC organizations, Government ministries, Home Land Command, local council authorities and service providers worked together to provide a seamless response to the needs.²³

Although geographically dispersed, serving various goals and representing diverse organizational commitments, this inter-agency coordination, it should be noted, is owed in part to the ITC’s professionalism and also to concerted efforts on a single, specific topic: mental vulnerability resulting from the immediate security situation at hand.

Another proof of this effort to connect the dots between various social players for the sake of building resilience came during the outbreak of the more recent “Knife Intifada,” when professional activity expanded dramatically:

Last summer we were working in a clear geographical area, now we are needed nationwide, facing new and more violent scenarios on a daily basis with great concern for the coming weeks. In our work in the South we have the benefit of established partnership. Today we are working with new partners and different needs. We are providing care, support and training for individuals and teams all over the country, following events and identified needs.²⁴

In a follow-up report, ITC experts could claim that

From Eilat (on the southern border of Israel) to Metula (on the northern border), every region and individual is insecure ... under the threat of attack. [...] Teamwork is critical; Sharing of information; Sharing of resources; Sharing of responsibilities.²⁵

ITC reports serve first, and foremost, as a vehicle for describing collaboration and connections between diverse organizational agencies within the confines of Israel, although the organization’s relevance has now expanded outside of the borders of Israel. Thus, already in 2014 we read:

In the wake of the devastation wrought by the recent typhoon, ITC is working in the Philippines to create a network of professional knowledge and support that will continue to long-term community rehabilitation. Following the deferment of the up-coming mission to the Philippines (due to the operation Protective Edge) we were inundated with messages of love and support from colleagues we have worked with there on the community resilience project.²⁶

This effort at strengthening ties to the international community despite its roots in the special national context of Israel gained significant expression following the terror attack in Paris on November 14, 2015. For days after the attack, ITC reports opened with the comment:

Israel, France, Belgium and the U.S. – The world has changed and now we are all one. We are united in our ideals whose existence relies on shared kindness and compassion. In the face of darkness, the way to cope and fight back is to remain united and support each other.

In one report, how this symbolic sharing of values is given practical meaning is described as follows:

ITC has already trained 80 clinicians who work with OSE – the large Jewish Welfare organization in Paris. [...] Currently we are in contact with the Israeli Embassy in Paris and have also offered to assist the education and health systems, preparing staff to deal with emergencies and the impact on students, in hospitals organizing information on casualties and working with families to provide information and support, training hospital support teams on short-term interventions and coping with psychological trauma caused by terrorism.²⁷

Connecting the dots between diverse organizational platforms aptly demonstrates the intention to make mental suffering of Israelis a public matter, both inside and outside Israel. The country's mental health experts have made it patently clear their goal is not to confine treating individuals suffering from post-traumatic symptoms to inside the clinic, but rather to recast themselves as an integral, even crucial part, of a much wider, national as well as global challenge.

From one mode of social action to another: emergency versus daily routine

The third practice underscoring resilience is expressed in ITC updates by moving back and forth between opposing modes of social action: emergency versus routine. Describing mental vulnerability as requiring both (a) rapid responses and flexibility and (b) stable and continuing professional interventions has enabled the experts to portray mental vulnerability as essentially rooted in two different areas: emergency but also daily routine. At the onset of operation "Protective Edge," ITC published the following announcement:

In response to the security situation ITC has activated a central operations room, in order to prioritize needs and resources. The operations room coordinates the flow of information between ITC partners, government ministers, Home Front Command and agencies and vice

versa. There will be a daily conference call with all partner organizations and Home Front Command has requested ITC help and assistance in providing real-time information from the field.²⁸

“Central operations room,” “prioritize needs and resources,” “coordination,” “flow of information,” “daily conferences,” “real time” – these terms and phrases from the field of security allow ITC to present mental vulnerability as a condition requiring high prioritization so long as the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians continues.

In the update published one day later, another attribute typically associated with “emergency” appears:

In all affected areas the [ITC] Crisis Response Teams have been activated. In all of the communities, emergency teams, clinicians, and volunteer responders provided emotional first aid to residents. Among the activities of the teams was the transfer of shared information about the events, communication with at-risk populations and emotional first aid to residents with intense reactions.²⁹

Claiming their capacity for large-scale operations – providing many different services in various places at one and the same time – puts trauma experts at the front line of coping with Palestinian attacks. Furthermore, the term “emotional first aid” creates a perfect parallel between urgent medical intervention (“first aid”) and therapeutic intervention (adding the term “emotional”). Thus, body and soul, the physical and the mental, become a single whole.

On the other hand, in stressing the relevancy of mental vulnerability to daily life in Israel, at the same time the specialists return to their “home base.” Their attempts at explaining the professional logic behind responding locally to all those in need is readily apparent from the following report published during the “Knife Intifada”:

We are offering parents [from the Jewish and Muslim quarters, Mount of Olives neighborhood and the City of David] a trauma guidance meeting. According to the needs identified at the meetings, we will arrange a variety of subsequent workshops to address specific issues including anxiety, behaviors to watch for, and how to discuss the tense and frightening situation with both teenagers and young children.³⁰

Recounting professional work among diverse Arab as well as Jewish populations in promoting personal awareness is precisely what one typically finds in self-reflective descriptions of their work by mental health experts.³¹ When cross-referenced with emergency procedures, however, these descriptions express a basic reframing by NATAL and ITC mental vulnerability in the face of security-based threats. Sadly, such threats are all too familiar to Israelis, as are acute situations calling for an urgent response at the communal and national levels, quite similar to cases of individual physical injury.

Concluding remarks

Promoting mental resilience against security-related traumatic and post-traumatic symptoms as

the new standard, and then inserting it into the public discourse on national security in Israel, invites a careful observation of the way the Zionist narrative itself has been projected, inside and outside the borders of Israel. While mental health experts from ITC are by no means representative of all mainstream Israeli psychiatric approaches, it does seem that their publicized activities represent a distinct period in Israeli society when a crucial shift has taken place in the “imagined boundary between the self and the national community.”³²

On the one hand, dealing professionally with trauma in the context of the protracted Arab–Israeli conflict originates in an individualistic worldview. This liberal-oriented emphasis on the individual as the principal object of analysis first began to surface in Israel as a direct consequence of the disheartening 1973 War. It was then that a justification for domestic NGOs promoting a human rights discourse emerged. Local activists in Israel, like their colleagues around the globe, tried to break through the collective boundaries of social identity and morality, one of their goals being to take action against the conventional division of “We, the Jews” as opposed “Them, the Arabs.” Globalization has given the individualistic worldview and its local advocates a strong headwind, providing a rationale for positioning the individual over the collective.

On the other hand, mental vulnerability is clearly associated with the socio-cultural system of collectivism in NATAL and ITC publications. From the outset, the therapists focused their attention on an initial formulation of traumatic injury rooted in the accepted political equation, again, of “We, the Jews” versus “Them, the Arabs.” This initial stance assumed a kind of symbiosis, real or imaginary, in bridging between the individual and the national collective. The reasoning is that mental harm to an individual from security-based trauma, as in the classic Arab–Israeli case, is in fact traceable to an event perpetrated on him/her as an integral part of the collective.

This new link between trauma as a clinical definition and the Israeli collectivist moral sentiment is further accentuated by touching upon one of the emotional crossroads in the Zionist narrative: victimization versus heroism.³³ The State of Israel’s emergence out of the Holocaust wove Jewish victimization into the Zionist narrative. At the same time, however, Israel’s birth as a sovereign entity highlighted the capacity for endurance and fighting. Almost unnoticed, this historic tension between the “old Jew,” passive and weak of body, and the “new Jew,” characterized by a stalwart physique and fighting strength, has entered into contemporary public and professional awareness of security-related trauma.

Successfully promoted by Israeli Jewish mental health experts, acknowledging trauma as a mental condition has created a modern-day interface between daily life in contemporary Israel and the traditional, well-known victimized stance one identifies with passivity, dysfunction and dissolution. Once framed and then praised as resilience, fortifying entire communities against post-traumatic symptoms now joins esteem for heroism as an emotional and social standard. Just as trauma and PTSD became an “elegant,” politically correct expression of victimization, so, resilience has become an “elegant,” politically correct expression of patriotism, strength and the capacity to endure.

Based on textual analysis, let me suggest, first, that this new component of the public discourse on Israel’s national security – resilience against trauma – rests on two authoritative sources: one clinical, scientific and thus universal. Circulating different types of data, and presenting different voices and narratives, Israeli mental health experts invite their readers, in Israel and beyond, to embrace a new form of “claiming victimhood.” This source cross-references the macro level of the historical Zionist narrative with the micro level of the

individual here-and-now.

Second, while physical prowess for many decades has played a crucial role in projecting Israel's national strength, in recent years it would appear that the mental condition of the Israeli body politic has gained a similar, certainly no less important role. Casting the Zionist narrative – centering on sovereignty to be won through heroism and collective sacrifice – into the narrative mold of (a) security-related trauma (the toll of lingering existential threat and multiple risks) and (b) resilience (the ability of individuals and communities to mentally cope with those threats and risks) has entailed recasting the protagonist in the national narrative.³⁴

The result is that in contrast to the clear distinction between Jews in Israel and Jews in the Diaspora, the new classification of security-related trauma wraps these two groups together, emphasizing their common denominator as a community of suffering and endurance – and resilience.

Trauma and resilience are not only “a new way for people to be,”³⁵ but also a new lens through which we are better able to interpret the relevancy of the Zionist narrative for contemporary life in Israel, and vice versa. In short, the Zionist narrative is today an accessible tool for interpreting mental resilience and vulnerability. From a mental disorder familiar to the select few therapists who deal with it professionally and only directly relevant for a small minority diagnosed with it, trauma has become a category of identity all Jews – those inside and those outside of Israel; those relatively more and relatively less insecure – are more readily able to identify with.

Notes

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- 15 On these institutions, see also the following chapter 24 by Elran and Padan in this volume.
 - 16 About the Israel Trauma Coalition, www.israeltraumacoalition.org.
 - 17 *ITC Report*, July 8, 2014.
 - 18 *ITC Report*, November 23, 2015.
 - 19 *ITC’s Report*, July 8, 2014.
 - 20 *ITC’s Report*, August 24, 2014.
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24

The civilian home front

In search of societal resilience

Meir Elran and Carmit Padan

Violent Arab opposition to the return of the Jews to Palestine long pre-dated the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. As early as the 1920s, conflict between the local Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine had become endemic and later escalated once regional Arab countries refused to accept the legitimacy of a sovereign Jewish state in the disputed land. By the time the British mandate came to a close, the conflict had escalated into a full-scale war which posed a severe challenge to the newly established state.

Over time, this animosity has found expression in two parallel tracks of protracted conflict. The first track consists of successive conventional wars between the armed forces of Israel and its neighboring Arab states; the second is characterized by persistent local terrorist attacks, most of which have targeted Israeli civilians and have been perpetrated by Palestinian individuals and organizations. The first track was prominent between the wars of 1948 and 1973. The second, while prevalent since before statehood, has become the dominant form of hostile interaction since the 1970s, with its re-emergence in novel configurations.

These two conflict tracks not only posed distinct challenges but also evoked different responses. In order to cope with state-to-state wars, Israel built a formidable military apparatus, which enabled it to deter the entire spectrum of Arab states and to establish formal peace relations with Egypt and Jordan. Response to terror campaigns has necessitated a more complex approach. Although clearly more powerful than its non-state terrorist foes, Israel has failed to translate its advantage into decisive victories. This paradox is rooted in the very nature of “low intensity” or “asymmetrical” conflicts which are primarily carried out not on relatively distant military fronts but in the midst of populated home fronts. This intricate challenge requires diverse responses based on different concepts, qualities and assets than those applicable to conventional warfare.

This chapter examines Israel’s counter-terrorist doctrine and practices on its home front. By way of introduction, we begin with a theoretical survey of the universal essence of terror. Thereafter, we shall discuss the changing nature of the terrorist threat against Israel and its evolving range of responses. Finally, we shall summarize the main lessons that can be drawn from the Israeli experience and discuss their possible application elsewhere.

Universal essence of terror

Since terrorism is a highly politicized term, totally dependent on the ideological perception of the beholder, international organizations fail to reach a consensus on the meaning of the term and its implications.¹ Academics, too, have proffered a multiplicity of ways in which terrorism and the malicious, violent generation of terror might be defined.² In this chapter, we suggest that terrorism is best characterized as

an ideologically rooted and maliciously motivated act of violence, directed at civilians, as the weaker link of the national chain, so as to frighten the public, to cause chaos and to demoralize the systemic routine, in order to pressure the leadership to succumb to the political demands of the perpetrators.

Consequently, terrorism of necessity has to be premeditated as a hostile act. It is based on political–ideological reasoning, utilizes fear to promote a political agenda and is intentionally directed at civilians.

Because the core purpose of terrorism is to strike fear into the hearts and minds of the adversary, it is primarily a psychological weapon,³ commonly used by a weaker opponent against a stronger foe. Indeed, the wider the gap between adversaries, in terms of strategic capacities, the more prone the weaker side will be to adopt violent terrorism. Only thus, he believes, can he attain goals unachievable by conventional military or diplomatic means. In the contemporary era, two salient forces within targeted nations themselves augment the effectiveness of terrorism’s psychological tactics: the media and the political leadership.⁴

In this context, the new social media plays a significant role in spreading and intensifying the horrific messages intended by the terrorists, amplifying their acts in ways which transform publics, whether proximate or distant bystanders, into participants of sorts in bloody scenes, thereby themselves becoming witnesses – and indeed “victims” – to remote acts of violence.⁵ Similarly, politics in western democracies too often promote public fear of terrorism by spreading the messages of threat, danger and enmity.⁶

Thus, a continuum is forged between (a) the act of terrorism, (b) the viral role of the media and (c) the cynical contribution of the political discourse to the dissemination of fear. This symbiosis furthers the perception of the threat of terror to the extent it occupies a position on the global agenda that is much more conspicuous than is warranted by its actual harm or its strategic achievements.

The Israeli case

The history of terrorism in Israel divides into four main chapters. The first preceded the establishment of the Jewish State, a period when most terrorist acts were local and directed at determining the political future of the land once the British Mandate ended. During the second period, which extended from the War of Independence in 1947–1949 until the Six-Day War of 1967, Israel ascribed most terrorist attacks to the neighboring Arab states. The third period parallels the emergence of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization), and its deliberate search for recognition, legitimacy and a Palestinian state following the 1967 War and the Israeli

occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. This wave of terror became especially intense in the wake of the 1993 Oslo Agreements. During the fourth period, anti-Israel terrorist activities shifted to Lebanon, where a Palestinian presence had been prominent since 1970. Israel's invasion of southern Lebanon in 1982, originally intended to terminate the terrorist threat from the north, inadvertently ignited a growing conflict between Israel and *Hizbullah*.

Throughout these four periods, terror attacks against Israel assumed diverse modes. Nevertheless, they shared a common denominator already noted as characteristic of terrorism's universal traits. At each stage, a non-state, weaker side (the Palestinians, and recently *Hizbullah*) sought to further its political goals and interests by resorting to violent means designed to terrorize Israel's civilian population.

Analysis of the evolving terrorist threat

Since the 1920s, more than 3,760 Israelis have lost their lives as a direct result of terrorist attacks. Of these, more than 3,400 were killed after the establishment of the state in 1948.⁷ The data merits more detailed analysis.

In the 1929 Arab Riots, 119 Jews were killed; 174 died during the 1936–1939 Arab Revolt (an average of 43 per year); 379 fatalities were counted during the War of Independence of 1947–1949 and 303 in the attacks launched by “*Fedayeen*” between 1950 and 1956 (an average of 50 per year). In the 1969–1970 War of Attrition, 107 were killed (an average of 53 per year) and 236 subsequent to the Oslo accords of 1993–1997 (an average of 47 per year). During the second Palestinian *Intifada* of 2000–2004, 1,044 persons were assassinated (an average of 209 per year!), and 203 between 2006 and 2016, a decade that witnessed both the Second Lebanon War and three rounds of fighting with *Hamas* in the Gaza Strip (an average of 18 per year).

Even though the quantity of fatalities is not the principal consideration in assessing the ramifications of terror, this data is nevertheless relevant to an understanding of Israel's defense posture towards this particular kind of threat:

- Statistical analysis reveals that there have been two main “spikes” of terror-related fatalities since 1947. The first coincided with the first year of the War of Independence (i.e., prior to the Arab invasion that commenced on May 15, 1948). However, since the Arab regular armies thereafter posed a greater threat to the newly established state, Israel's security doctrine downplayed the risk posed by local Palestinians and militias. In fact, from the early days of statehood, Israel's evolving defense doctrine focused primarily on military engagements with regular armed forces and only remotely on less-intensive counter-terrorism. This emphasis on conventional warfare shifted somewhat during and after the second *Intifada* of 2000–2004 – which witnessed the second and highest “spike” of terror-related Israeli fatalities, almost 50% of which were caused by Palestinian “suicide bombers”;
- While these attacks did not imperil the existence of the State of Israel they certainly adversely affected the morale of its citizens and raised questions about their resilience.⁸ Nevertheless, the traditional military approach (including that vis-à-vis terrorism) remained largely intact, undergoing only limited adjustments in response to the changing circumstances of the Arab–Israeli conflict;
- Although terrorism ranks high on the Israeli national agenda of threats, from a historical

perspective its actual effect has been relatively moderate. One of the most rarely cited of statistics in Israeli discourse is that the annual average number of Jewish fatalities over the course of the last century, as reliable an indicator as any other of the severity of Palestinian acts of terror, has been less than 40. By comparison, deaths from road accidents averaged 380 annually during the period 2000–2012;⁹

- Furthermore, throughout the last century the number of severe and costly terrorist attacks against Israel has fluctuated dramatically, leaving long periods of relative stability during which few major terrorist incidents have been serious enough to cause serious disruption to civilian routines. For example, the recent wave of individual acts of terror (2015–2017), carried out mostly in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, peaked in October 2015 (59), then declined to a monthly average of 34 incidents until March 2016, and thereafter sank to a record low of 5–13 incidents per month until October 2017.¹⁰

Admittedly, quantitative analysis tells only part of the real story. Given that terrorism represents a form of psychological warfare, its repercussions, in the Israeli case (as in others) should be examined through public perceptions of its impact. In this regard, statistics play a lesser role. Their impact is subordinate to the political setting and the way acts of terror are framed and conveyed to the local (and international) audience. As such, terrorism is depicted in Israel primarily by accentuating the consequences of the horrific episodes rather than by presenting the actual statistics.

For seven decades Israelis have faced diverse forms of terrorism, all directed at the same goal of disrupting civilian life and bringing horror to the streets. Launched with the aim of pressuring governments in Jerusalem to accept the perpetrators' demands, these incidents have ranged from individual to organized acts of terror and from attacks abroad to local strikes. The span of their scope has also widened, extending from relatively minor incidents, such as knife stabbings or vehicle ramming, to more extreme use of firearms and explosives and from skyjacking passenger airplanes to kidnapping civilians. In terms of their impact, the two most effective weapons in the terrorist arsenal have been suicide bombings and the launching of high trajectory weapons systems.

Palestinians first began to use suicide bombing¹¹ as a *primary* weapon against Israeli civilians in 1993. Such attacks only became prominent in the years 2000–2004,¹² when, as Table 24.1 shows, they were responsible for an exceedingly high number of Israeli deaths.

The effectiveness of suicide bombings was not solely due to the high number of fatalities, but was also reflected in the deep sense of insecurity and stress that they induced in the population at large. The following phenomena apparently made the greatest impression: Palestinians were willing to sacrifice their lives;¹³ they succeeded in penetrating into the heart of Israeli communities; and they evinced no qualms about directly encountering their victims.

What exacerbated this experience was the public perception that Israel's military and police were not capable really of supplying civilians with the protection required to foil similar attacks in the future. Media coverage of these incidents was extremely graphic, broadening the circle of Israelis exposed to the horrific scenes of death and gravely impacting upon the country as a whole.¹⁴ Arguably, had Israel not responded to this severe threat with a drastic all-out military offensive in 2002, designed to recapture the Palestinian strongholds in the West Bank and to reassert Israel's control over that region in its entirety, these terrorist attacks could have escalated to a level that might have seriously weakened the resilience of Israeli society.

Table 27.1. Suicide bombing attacks during the Second Intifada, 2000–2007

Year	Number of attacks	Number of Israeli fatalities
2000	4	–
2001	34	85
2002	55	220
2003	25	142
2004	14	55
2005	7	22
2006	4	15
2007	1	3
Total	144	542

Source: Adapted from data supplied in: Ben White, Jan. 10, 2014, The Electronic Intifada, Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <https://electronicintifada.net/tags/israeli-ministry-foreign-affairs>

High trajectory weapons launched against Israeli civilian targets have constituted the other most effective form of terror. Palestinians began using standoff weapons (mostly mortars and Katyusha rockets) against Israel in the late 1960s, when the PLO and other organizations exploited their strongholds in northern Jordan as bases from which they could harass Jewish settlements in the Beit She’an Valley. Following the PLO’s expulsion to Lebanon in 1970–1971, the main terrorist front shifted to northern Galilee, where Jewish localities (especially the town of Kiryat Shmona, targeted by almost 4,000 rockets since 1968) have been periodically subjected to cross-border rocket fire.

With the 1982 Israeli conquest of southern Lebanon, this threat was eliminated only temporarily. The PLO may have been expelled from the country, but the danger it posed was renewed with the emergence of *Hizbullah*, the local Shiite militia. The IDF’s withdrawal from southern Lebanon in 2000 ushered in a short period of relative stability, followed, however, by renewed deterioration towards the Second Lebanon War in 2006, when the High Trajectory Fire (HTF) directed by *Hizbullah* against civilian localities in northern Israel inaugurated a new phase of this threat. HTF has since become the primary strategic means whereby Israel’s foes terrorize its civilian population. It is now actively employed on two fronts: the Gaza Strip (since 2001) and Lebanon.¹⁵

Here, too, statistics reveal only part of the picture. Since 2001, almost 20,000 rocket launches have been monitored, 75% emanating from Gaza.¹⁶ These figures include the more intense launches during the 2008–2009, 2012 and 2014 rounds of fighting between Israel and *Hamas*, when the daily average was 120 attacks. At time of writing (early 2018), attacks emanating from Lebanon since 2001 have caused the deaths of 44 civilians and those from Gaza another 48, giving an average of not more than six fatalities per year.

High Trajectory Fire also had additional consequences. Rocket attacks cause wide-scale disruptions of daily life in larger parts of the country and necessitate the evacuation of masses of citizens from their homes during periods of hostilities. In turn, these continuous harassments have generated a high percentage of PTSD and other types of mental disruptions among the population (found prevalent mostly among children).¹⁷ On the strategic level, the overall perception has been that by employing HTF, *Hizbullah* and perhaps *Hamas*, too, have managed to attain a viable deterrence posture vis-à-vis Israel, one that might significantly inhibit broad counter-offensives actions by the IDF.¹⁸

A state of mutual deterrence between Israel and its two main active contemporary non-state

adversaries serves to highlight an important aspect of fighting such adversaries. Deterrence, a long accepted strategy in interstate conflicts, has now become a constant feature of the confrontation between Israel, *Hizbullah* and *Hamas*. Perhaps for the first time, these adversaries possess the capacity to pose a strategic threat to Israel. IDF assessments attribute to *Hizbullah* and (to a lesser extent) *Hamas* a far more robust offensive HTF capability, sufficient to disrupt severely the Israeli home front in foreseeable conflicts.¹⁹

Such a scenario, as envisioned by the Israeli intelligence community, transforms terrorism into a top-priority issue on the nation's strategic agenda. Terrorism against the Jewish State and its people currently poses a *multifaceted* and *strategic* threat. It challenges the country's leaders and security establishment to fashion a strategic response that is both versatile and flexible, and that will ensure the routine continuity of Israeli society and sustain its resilience

Evolving Israeli responses to diverse terrorist threats

The current IDF Chief of Staff, Major-General Gadi Eisenkot, observed in 2010:

The primary insight I had as a commander in Judea and Samaria during that war on terror (the second *Intifada*) was that the most effective way of fighting terrorism is to control the territory and the population. Without a responsible element controlling the area and the inhabitants, I do not see a way of fighting terrorism effectively.²⁰

This statement suggests that as far as Israel is concerned, terrorism is a permanent fact and feature of life – certainly as long as there is no political solution to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; and, by implication, should the IDF not exercise tight control over the Palestinian territories. In fact, one can go further and argue that even when the IDF *has* been in control of the territories (in the Gaza Strip before the disengagement of 2005, and presently in the West Bank) Israel nonetheless has been challenged periodically by waves of terror.

Over the years, Israel has employed numerous alternative strategies in an effort to restrain terrorism. One singular path taken once was that of negotiation, through the 1993 Oslo process. This strategy failed to produce peace and, in fact, was accompanied by intense acts of terror during and after the formal talks ended inconclusively. Otherwise, the three main core Israeli strategies of counter-terrorism have traditionally coalesced into three principal postures: offense, deterrence and defense.

- **The offensive component:** The most prevalent form of Israeli response to terror during the early 1950s was “reprisal” or “retaliation” raids.²¹ These offensive measures aimed at curbing sporadic infiltration by Palestinians and continuous acts of terror perpetrated by “*Fedayeen*” units, largely backed and trained by Egyptian intelligence in Gaza and later by the Jordanian military. While Moshe Dayan and Ariel Sharon synchronized the execution of the reprisal policy, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion articulated its rationale. He justified this type of action on the grounds, inter alia, that it responded to the outrage and frustration felt by Israeli citizens.²² In other words, offensive counter-terrorism is founded, from early days, partially – if not primarily – on domestic political considerations.

Israeli “reprisal” raids ceased to be necessary after the 1956 Sinai Campaign, which produced a

relative lull in terrorist activities until after the 1967 war. Nevertheless, the offensive concept, both overt and covert, remains a major paradigm for Israeli responses to terror. Over the years, it has been applied on all fronts, including cross-border, regional and even international contexts, and against all foes, be they states, non-state organizations or terrorist gangs and individuals.

Indeed, offensive response remains the central pillar of Israel's defense doctrine.²³ As such, it has been one of the organizing principles of the IDF and a basic theme in its *esprit de corps*. Although it has therefore become the default choice of Israeli military activity, it is debatable whether this offensive pattern truly fulfills the goal of lessening the frequency or severity of terrorist assaults. Certainly, it has failed to terminate them altogether, while at the same time often triggering international pressure on Israel.

- **The deterrence component:** In order to compensate for the shortcomings in the offensive mode, Israel has elevated the concept of deterrence to a level of supremacy. Augmenting deterrence has added a supplementary rationale to Israeli offensive responses to terrorism, as it envisages the application of force as a means of influencing the enemy's perceptions and level of willingness to take risks. Offensive measures may not be powerful enough to necessarily bring adversaries to abandon permanently all terrorist activity (a feature of life that Israel virtually takes for granted), but they can perhaps suffice to ensure longer intervals between rounds of major terrorist assaults and campaigns, such as are typified by recent major *Hizbullah* and *Hamas* assaults. This approach has been summarized in the document entitled *IDF Strategy*, published by the Chief of Staff in July 2015, which defines deterrence as a "perceptual (element), based on physical actions impacting the enemy's considerations, such as: the results of previous conflicts, occasional actions emphasizing the futility of conflict, and the constant threat by the IDF to use force."²⁴

Not in all cases has this formula proven sufficiently sound; particularly not in the context of fighting terrorism.²⁵ Even so, some successes are apparent. The Lebanese front, for instance, has been mostly stable since the last major conflict with *Hizbullah* in 2006, indicating the possible attainment of a high degree of deterrence against the Shiite terrorist ensconced across Israel's northern border. With a dose of caution, the same might be said of *Hamas* following Israel's 2014 campaign in Gaza.²⁶ Nevertheless, the advantages of deterrence are acknowledged to be limited since deterrence is commonly understood in Israel to be always temporary, contingent and fragile; without a comprehensive political arrangement, further waves of terrorism against the civilian home front will inevitably erupt.

- **The defensive component:** Unlike offensive raids and deterrent operations, Israel gradually and hesitantly has adopted defensive measures to provide security to its challenged home front. Indeed, and as is manifested by the Civil Defense Act of 1951, the use of different kinds of sheltering was from the first recognized and practiced, though minimally. Only in the last decade and a half has Israel started to understand, acknowledge and to invest seriously in defensive measures. Two cases most vividly illustrate the ascendance of the defensive strategy. One is the massive investment in the construction of barriers – walls and sophisticated fences – along Israel's porous borderlines. The other is the development and deployment of the highly successful active defense Israeli-made anti-rocket system known as "Iron Dome,"²⁷ which serves as the tactical layer of the multilevel extensive active defense system.

The first practical evidence of the shift towards a defensive mode came in 2004, when – following a particularly vicious round of suicide bombings in 2002 – Ariel Sharon’s cabinet decided on the construction of a physical separation barrier in the West Bank, designed to foil penetration from that area into Israel by Palestinian terrorists. This expensive investment is supplemented at present by a sophisticated wall along the Gaza Strip border estimated at costing more than one billion dollars. The defensive component was conceptualized by the Meridor Commission,²⁸ formed in 2004 to reconsider and update the Israeli national security doctrine. Its most salient proposal was that “Defense” be added as the fourth feature to the triad of security “pillars” that had hitherto held sway: deterrence, early warning and decisive victory.²⁹ It is of course doubtful whether the new formula can provide a panacea. After all, experience teaches that all physical barriers are vulnerable to penetration by one means or another, as were (for instance) France’s Maginot Line in 1940 and Israel’s Bar-Lev Line in 1973. Nevertheless, Israel’s security leadership seems increasingly persuaded of the advantages of physical defense.

Societal resilience as an imperative strategy

For all their differences, the three primary strategies of Israeli responses to terrorism (or to any other security threat) – offense, deterrence and defense – are predicated on the notion that the brunt of security – related allocations for the home front should be invested in “tangible resistance.” This traditional approach is designed to foil terrorist attacks and at the same time to provide clear evidence of action meant to demonstrate the government is indeed responsive to the needs of the home front: tangible measures such as walls and an active anti-rocket defense system provide impressive evidence of such responsiveness. They are understandably more imposing than other, impalpable, measures, such as enhancing the social capacity of the targeted civilians to withstand the hardships of terror. Notable here is that such calculations, rooted in domestic political considerations, are not unique to Israel and are common in the field of homeland security. In other countries, too, the notion that resistance constitutes the *main* (and sometimes the only) response to terrorism remains prevalent.

The fault with that approach lies in that it downplays, and sometimes altogether disregards, the importance to counter-terrorism of an entirely different approach, which focuses on meeting the psychological needs of the targeted civilians. This is the essence of what is here termed the “resilience strategy.”

Like terrorism itself, resilience too is a multifaceted term, particularly when applied to the field of homeland security.³⁰ It refers to the capacity of any system (personal, social, economic, infrastructure or a nation as a whole) to contain the negative consequences of a major disruption (such as a major terrorist attack). To mitigate the diminishing effects of any anticipated functional degradation; to bounce back rapidly; and even to bounce forward to a higher level of functionality than the disrupted system.³¹ The academic and practical field of disaster management has increasingly adopted the notion of resilience as a leading strategy to respond to manmade and natural disasters.³²

Far from being an abstract or interdisciplinary theory, resilience (as thus defined) merits respect as a strategic framework for action. The resilience of any system – and particularly societal resilience – is not inherent in the system itself but is an objective achievable only through awareness of its members, followed by conscious, purposive individual and collective effort. Although the literature recognizes numerous attributes, the most relevant to the Israeli

context are those factors contributing to the social capital of a community,³³ such as bonding, leadership, trust and cohesiveness. Generally, the assumption is that while taking into consideration the gravity of the disruption, communities possessing high levels of social capital will be more resilient in the face of terrorist attacks and will be able to move forward, even to a higher level of conduct, than communities with lesser social capital.³⁴

Israel's experience with resilience enhancement in the face of severe terrorism has been impressive but quite limited. Its first experiments with the approach were conducted during the 1980s, when northern communities were attacked, and proved notably successful,³⁵ when communities traumatized by protracted acts of terror managed to recover with professional assistance. The lessons learnt from that experience were subsequently refined and implemented in several localities. The organization that has in this respect been most prominent is the Israeli Trauma Coalition, an NGO founded in 2002 that is largely funded by donations from Jewish Federations in the United States, and also receives Israeli government subsidies. Since 2007, the Coalition has established five Resilience Centers (in Hebrew: "*merkazei khossen*"),³⁶ which in association with the local authorities adjacent to the Gaza Strip provide professional assistance to the communities exposed to repeated acts of terror.³⁷

This effort has proven remarkably successful where frontier communities are concerned. Among the tasks performed by the Resilience Centers are thoroughly preparing local communities to face future terrorist attacks, guiding them how best to organize so that they might adequately operate under stress, assisting them in planning mass evacuation in case of need, augmenting the local municipal leadership and providing psychological and social assistance to the population.³⁸ It is largely thanks to the Centers that Israeli communities under fire have managed to withstand heavy and sustained terrorist attacks and even to flourish thereafter. In fact, the enhanced societal resilience displayed by communities in direct proximity to the embattled Gaza Strip can serve as an example to communities around the world challenged by major manmade or natural disruptions. More specific to the local context, those manifestations demonstrate how social resilience adds to the deterrence posture of Israel against its foes.

One can argue that when the devastated and besieged Palestinian residents of Gaza observe developments on the Israeli side of the border in the wake of the last three major campaigns, in terms of economic and social prosperity, they might be dissuaded from initiating another large-scale HTF offense against Israel. Nevertheless, and notwithstanding supportive statements from senior officials and decision-makers about the significance of resilience in the struggle against terrorism, these local successes stories have not inspired the adoption of either a nationwide plan or sufficient budget allocation to enhance resilience nationwide, as a leading strategy, complementary to the resistance strategy. What is urgently needed is to establish Resilience Centers in all local authorities throughout the country, to serve as a pivot for systemic collaboration between all agencies that are connected to disaster management, governmental, military (through the Home Front Command), municipal and NGOs. In fact, while Israel is investing billions of Shekels in promoting defensive and other resistance measures for the home front, at the time of this writing it does not allocate the resources needed for enhancing resilience by those communities most likely to be targeted in the next prospective terrorist attack. Indeed, according to the updated threat scenario, all populated regions in Israel are liable to be targeted by rockets and missiles, some of them accurate, in the next war.

Summary

As argued in this chapter, the basic assumption for any in-depth discussion concerning the future security of the Israeli home front is the continuous presence of terrorism. The Middle East is expected to remain perhaps the most volatile region in the world, and one that is characterized by the prevalence of the new form of conflict. The pitched battles between standing armies of warring states, which predominated during an earlier era, are being replaced increasingly by bloody intrastate domestic conflicts, terrorism and other forms of armed clashes that are not fought on distant battlefields but pointedly within the very midst of densely populated areas.³⁹ For Israel's security planners this transformation represents a major conceptual challenge, whose scope and implications they are required to internalize.

Perhaps the most salient document addressing this distinct security challenge is *IDF Strategy*, which mirrors military thinking and threat assessments in Israel as of 2015.⁴⁰ One of the most interesting facets of this document is that it all but avoids discussing strategic responses to acts of terrorism originating from within or taking place inside the occupied territories that so preoccupy IDF policing ground forces under singularly strenuous conditions. Instead, the document focuses on semi-military challenges posed by cross-border terrorist attacks directed by *Hizbullah* and *Hamas*, analyzing them mostly with reference to the nexus between the *offensive* and the *deterrence* strategies. As noted above, that approach, supplemented by marginal references to the defensive mode, is consonant with traditional Israeli military thinking, which has always proposed meeting all threats – to the home front as to any other – by a three-tiered program of “resistance” comprising: anticipatory assaults; measures designed to avert or postpone a hostile attack; and steps to mitigate its harmful consequences.

This chapter argues that the traditional approach is not commensurate with the present challenge posed by terrorism. Determined, persistent would-be perpetrators of terrorist acts will invariably find ways to carry out their intentions despite preventive measures and barriers. Hence, a viable and holistic strategic response to threats against the home front should augment the multiple resistance approach by integrating within it the resilience paradigm. Synthesizing the two – *resistance* towards one's enemy, and *resilience* toward one's own civilian population – can provide the optimal strategic formula for a synergetic Israeli response to terrorism.⁴¹ Indeed, that the Israeli civilian home front has demonstrated a high level of resiliency thus far⁴² in the face of protracted terrorism, coupled with strong military offensive and defensive measures, arguably ought to contribute to restraining terrorism. Worthy of emphasis in this respect is the PLO's reserved approach following the second *Intifada*, which serves as a possible lesson in light of its marked failure to achieve any major political gain from the worst terror campaign on record.

Such a holistic approach to counter-terrorism is not advisable solely in the Israeli context. It is equally applicable to the global war on terror and as a response to severe natural disruptions. The introduction of resilience into the theory and practice of disaster management, learnt also from the positive lessons of the Israeli experience, might well enable the international community to withstand a wide range of highly expensive disturbances. Investment in resilience is a wise strategic decision and promises to pay handsome dividends.

Finally, it is worth underlining that a sound counter-terrorism strategy cannot rely exclusively on military means. Israeli security leaders must address the needs of the exposed civilian population in two interconnected ways: by greater investment in enhancing societal resilience and by strengthening the confidence of civilians that terrorism can be contained. Terrorism, after

all, is generally more successful at intimidation than in attaining tangible political gains. This does not make terrorism less significant as a major security disturbance. It does, however, put the phenomenon in a more realistic perspective, which is in itself a precondition for any valid, effective counter-terrorism strategy.

Notes

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Women and the Israeli military culture

Orna Sasson-Levy and Gilly Hartal

The relationship between security and gender has long been central to the academic discourse, both in Israel and beyond. The standard argument is that militarization processes create and reinforce dichotomous, hierarchical and essentialist perceptions of femininity and masculinity, thereby relegating women to the status of second-class citizens.¹ Given the militarist nature of Israeli society, this argument is pertinent to scholarship concentrating on Israel, which has long validated the contention.² However, in this chapter, we ask how Israeli women located at relatively powerful intersectional positions of ethnicity, class and nationality might, in fact, actually capitalize on their positionality to gain power in the military and political arenas.

Introduction

For present purposes, we define militarism as a combination of ideology, institutional practices and everyday interactions that promote an understanding that weapons and the management of violence are routine, self-evident and integral to Jewish Israeli culture. Over quarter of a century ago, Baruch Kimmerling argued that “cultural militarism” characterizes Israel, in the sense that (a) armed forces are deemed essential to the social experience and collective identity, and (b) wars are perceived to be unavoidable.³ Employing Kimmerling’s definition of Israel as a militarist society, Hannah Herzog subsequently wrote: “life in the shadow of a protracted Arab–Israeli conflict and constant [perceived] threat has become a powerful mechanism for reproducing the gendered division of labor, and, consequently, gender inequality.”⁴

Although this argument seems self-evident, its fault is that it assumes security issues and militarism exert a *uniformly negative* impact on women. Moreover, it fails to consider the political–historical development of security and militarization in Israel and the Middle East, and thus portrays the association of militarism and gender in static, a-historical terms.

In order to challenge the uniformity of this interpretation and propose a more nuanced and complex analysis of the relations between gender and security, we propose adopting an intersectional approach.⁵ According to the intersectionality framework,⁶ gender is constructed at the intersections of ethnicity, class and nationality, which together establish a “junction which is not necessarily a product of the different roads that lead to it.”⁷ Intersectionality can signify fluid categories of identity and subjectivity (who people are and how they identify), or political

structures of inequality (the way the social structure works to establish and preserve power).⁸By applying this framework, we wish to ask how women located at relatively powerful intersectional positions in Israel can use their positionality to gain power in the military and political arenas. Guided by the intersectionality framework, we here propose both a modifying argument and a counter-argument to the standard argument that opened this chapter.

- The modifying argument is that distinct groups of women are positioned differently vis-à-vis the military complex. Women from marginalized groups and non-Jewish women in particular suffer politically and economically from the dominance of security issues within Israeli society – more than do women from hegemonic groups;
- The counter-argument is that women who identify with nationalism and accept militarism as essential for security – which is true of most Jewish women in Israel – do not see themselves as victims of militarization. On the contrary, they promote their social status by participating in militarist institutions and the militarist discourse, with the aim of gaining power from *within* the dynamic Israeli militarist society.

Thus, Israeli militarism functions as a double-edged sword. It includes some women in the national(ist) collective and enhances their sense of belonging and self-worth, while simultaneously marginalizing and even excluding others by denying them the economic and political opportunities afforded to male members of the militarist culture.

Consequently, women in Israel either reap the benefits of militarism or suffer its costs depending on their social and geographical positioning, their political views, their education and even their age group. Moreover, in Israel's case, relations of women to security are also quite dynamic and change over time. The state has always offered women the opportunity to attain membership of the national collective by joining the bandwagon of militarism. However, it is really only over the past two decades, with the (perceived and actual) intensification of geopolitical threats, and the growing involvement of women in combat military roles, that they have also been given the option of gaining power through militarist institutions.

These changes in gender–security relations lie at the heart of this chapter. Its first section elaborates on the conventional argument that militarization hinders women's social status, whereas the second part presents the opposite argument, showing how militarism can incorporate and even empower some groups of women. We conclude with theoretical questions that emerge from the intersection of these contradictory arguments.

Part 1: The marginalizing edge: women as victims of militarism

The argument that militarism is detrimental to women's status has a long pedigree. In "Democracy or Militarism" (1899), peace activist Jane Addams (1860–1935) claimed that to accept militaristic actions as a part of international politics is to normalize further violence. To support her claim, she cited instances of increased social violence, which she connected to the formal acceptance of war. In "War Times Changing Women's Traditions" (1916), Addams identified the gender dimension of growing militarism in World War I, and argued that war valued soldiers and devalued women and children.⁹

Similarly, contemporary scholars often associate militaristic ideology with gender stratification and inequality.¹⁰ As the institution most closely associated with the state, the Israel Defense Force (IDF) carries the spirit of militarism into society, and thus shapes gender relations well beyond the barracks. Israel is the only country in the world that conscripts both men and women, which could signify the construction of a gendered egalitarian citizenship. However, even though its recruitment and promotion policies are based purportedly on universal and achievement-based criteria, the Israeli army remains a male-dominated territory where masculinity – exclusively identified with power and authority – is the norm.

Unlike men, women are easily exempt from military service on grounds of marriage, pregnancy or religious beliefs. Thus, the law grants priority to a woman's family roles over her obligations to military service.¹¹ Women comprise only 34% of the regular army, and serve a shorter conscript term (24 months as opposed to a man's 32 months). These differences alone limit the range of roles to which women may be assigned, and constitute a definite barrier to women's advancement in the military and well beyond – creating a veritable "brass ceiling."¹²

The militarist culture of Israel preserves the perception of men and in particular soldiers as courageous protectors. This image derives from the ongoing violent conflict between Israel and its neighbors; but also from efforts at portraying Israeli fighters as ethical, gallant men who confront the world's difficulties and dangers in order to protect women and children. As Iris Marion Young noted, this construction of the courageous, responsible and virtuous warrior positions women as the ones who adore their protector and defer to his judgment in return for the promise of security. The role of the masculine protector places those protected, paradigmatically women and children, in subordinate positions.¹³

This relationship, of masculine protector and protected women, is reproduced in the structure of citizenship, which is pivotal, as it not only bonds the individual and the state but affects all other aspects of societal life. In militaristic societies such as Israel, a republican discourse defines citizenship in accordance with an individual's contribution to state security, which determines in turn the level of civil rights that he or she can enjoy.¹⁴ Once citizenship is identified with military service, it is constructed according to the life-cycle of men, thereby creating a gendered hierarchical citizenship.¹⁵ Even when enlisted by law Israeli women are not seen as equal partners in the performance of ultimate obligations to the state but are pushed instead to the margins of republican citizenship.¹⁶

Such a militarized structure of citizenship is based therefore on the gender construction of the military itself. Indeed, the decision to conscript women has not changed the gender power relations in the Israeli military. The military remains a masculine organization in which gender is

a formal and overt organizing principle.¹⁷ As we shall see, from the *macro* level of citizenship, through the *meso* level of the political, the military and the labor market, to the *micro* level of family spaces and gender identities, protector–protected relations have far-reaching consequences for women’s status in Israeli society.

In the following sections, we examine each level sequentially.

Women in the military

For many years, most women in the Israeli military served in “feminine roles” such as secretaries or welfare NCOs. However, a significant change in the military gender regime was introduced in 1995, when the Israeli High Court of Justice, in a landmark decision (*Alice Miller v. the Ministry of Defense*) ruled that the military had to enroll suitably qualified women in the prestigious Air Force Academy. This ruling eventually led to the opening of additional combat roles for women in units such as the border police, anti-aircraft batteries, artillery, light infantry and naval commandos. The IDF Women’s Corps was dismantled in 2000, and many training courses, including officer training, became gender-integrated.¹⁸ Since 2000, no less than four semi-infantry gender-mixed battalions are actively engaged in securing the borders with Egypt and Jordan.

Despite these reforms, the IDF gender regime remains largely intact, as only 9% of Israeli women soldiers serve in combat roles.¹⁹ Women are barred from armored, infantry and reconnaissance elite units, the three specialties at the core of combat. Officially, 92% of military occupations are open to women, but in 2008 it was found that half of all military roles were still dominated by men.²⁰ These included most occupations paving the way to advancement to senior military – and civilian – positions. The brass ceiling for women is located five ranks below the pinnacle of the military hierarchy: in 2016, the most recent year for which official statistics are available, women comprised 25% of all majors, but only 14% of lieutenant colonels, and 10% of colonels. Only four women were brigadier generals.²¹

Although women have yet to achieve equality in the military, improvements in the military’s gender regime, especially in assigning women to serve alongside men in the field, have sparked a backlash, led mainly by rabbis, who claim that men who serve together with women cannot observe Jewish modesty laws. To accommodate these sentiments, the IDF appointed an “appropriate integration” committee, tasked with defining rules for joint service. These rules, promulgated in 2002, permitted male religious soldiers to serve in gender-segregated units, and set standards regarding women’s dress with the purpose of protecting the modesty of both religious men and women soldiers.²²

Nevertheless, the religious establishment expressed dissatisfaction with these rules and protested that the military was foisting secular values on religious soldiers (for instance by commanding men to serve alongside women or to attend lectures about acceptance of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender [LGBT] soldiers). In December 2017, the Chief of Staff issued new orders exempting religious soldiers from joint activities with women, including guard duty and land navigation training.²³ The order reiterates the principle that joint service of men and women is subject to Jewish law in its most stringent interpretation, and privileges religious male soldiers’ sensitivities over women’s equal rights for equal military service.

Religionization of Israeli society in general,²⁴ and theocratization of the IDF in particular,²⁵ have clear ramifications for women’s roles and opportunities in the army. As a result of these

trends women are excluded from certain “masculine-religious” units or subject to a campaign that altogether opposes their service.²⁶ Speaking specifically of Orthodox women, Rabbi Yigal Levinstein, the head of a pre-conscription religious academy situated in the West Bank, in March 2017 informed his all-male student body:

They are driving our girls [*sic*] crazy. They draft them. They join [the IDF] as Jews and they are not Jewish when they are discharged [...]. Their entire value system becomes confused, their priorities – home, career ... They will make them all crazy. Agreeing to this is forbidden.²⁷

In January 2018, the Israeli Air Force appointed its first-ever female squadron commander. In reaction, Rabbi Shmuel Eliyahu called on Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot to resign on the charge that he, Eizenkot, had adopted “a crazy feminist agenda,” and that men’s motivation to serve declined because of gender integration.²⁸ These sentiments were also voiced in Israel’s parliament where Bezalel Smotrich, a member of the *Knesset* who represents the right-wing religious party *Ha-Bayit Ha-Yehudi*, roundly castigated female participation in combat units, arguing that the IDF’s task is “to win wars, not promote all kinds of ‘enlightened and liberal values’.”²⁹

Women’s military service in Israel thus has double significance. On the one hand, it does enable women to enter the public sphere of citizenship and contribute to the country’s security. On the other hand, the military’s gender division of labor, together with its chauvinist culture and the growing religious backlash against the presence of women in the army, reproduce dichotomous, hierarchical and essentialist perceptions of femininity.

Women in politics

One result of women’s marginality in the military used to be their exclusion from the political field. A career in the military and intelligence apparatus granted men, and only men, public visibility and an aura of responsibility, professionalism and authority, which makes the transition from the security to the political elite both swift and easy. Several of Israel’s prime ministers have been former combat officers; and former security officials have served as ministers of education, science and development/technology, communication, health, foreign affairs, police, defense, housing, science, culture and sport, tourism, transportation, industry and trade and regional development.³⁰

In their 2006 essay, Oren Barak and Gabi Sheffer explain this tight link between the military and political spheres in Israel via the development of a highly informal but very potent “security network.” Since 1967, they argue, members of the security establishment have effectively monopolized national security priority setting. Incumbent and former security officials also maintain close ties with leaders in the political, administrative and business sectors. Participants in this network tend to share common values and perceptions regarding Israel’s security, have similar individual and collective interests, and are capable of joining hands significantly to influence policymaking.

This hierarchical power structure has significant implications for women, given that members of the “security network” are predominantly men. Consequently, women find it much harder to participate in political and socio-economic decision-making. Thus, Sarai Aharoni found in her

study of women's participation in the 1990s Israeli–Palestinian peace process that very few Israeli women ever sat among official Israeli and Palestinian negotiators.³¹ Even these few were almost all positioned “backstage” as professional and legal advisors, spokeswomen and secretaries. Supremacy of the military at the negotiation table shaped the image of a “good negotiator” as a military man, and contributed to shaping professional segregation based upon traditional gender roles.

Amal Jamal argues further that perceptions of national security also mean that Palestinian-Arab citizens of Israel enjoy only “hollow citizenship”; their secondary status in Israeli society is due to and legitimized by the security threat. In patriarchal Arab society, women are the first victims of “hollow citizenship.” For example, Israeli citizenship laws, confirmed as constitutional by the Israeli High Court in May 2006, limit, for security concerns, the right of Arab citizens to live with their spouses, if the latter reside in Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in 1967.

The right of naturalization for aliens (non-Jews) who marry Israeli citizens is likewise denied to Palestinians (mostly women) from those territories.³² Thus, Palestinian women from the occupied territories, who according to custom move after their marriage to live with their husband's family in Israel, find themselves living for many years without the right to work, to travel (to own a passport), to social security, to health benefits, social benefits and more. This is one more example of how women from marginalized groups become the main victims of nationalist–militarist policies.

Women in the labor market

Although there exists no updated and comprehensive research on the ways that security issues shape women's positions in the labor market in Israel, the gender inequality constructed by the “security network” is evident there, too.³³ As a general observation, we assume that the dominance of the security discourse in Israel erects both formal and informal obstacles to women's experience and advancement in the labor market. Formal obstacles are evident in the various occupations that entirely restrict employment to former combat soldiers, as is the case in the intelligence apparatus (such as the General Security Services [*Shabak*] and the *Mossad*) and various private security companies. Elsewhere, the exclusion of women is not formal or palpable, but subtle, reproducing a structure in which the prestige of military service benefits men. This is true, for example, in many high-tech companies based on employees' prior service in military intelligence units, and which recruit new personnel through their current employee networks, leaving little room for women in such companies.³⁴ Even high schools tend to prefer high-ranking former officers as principals, thus marginalizing women even in traditionally “feminine” realms such as education.³⁵

Similarly, many retired officers serve as directors of large public and private companies, managers of banks and high-tech firms – a particularly powerful growth engine in the Israeli economy. Under their influence, substantial segments of private industry have become security-oriented, again limiting women's opportunities.³⁶ Arab women, and at times also ultra-Orthodox (*haredi*) Jewish women and women from the lower-class are excluded from the more lucrative occupations in Israel, and on occasion even from simple, non-prestigious occupations because they did not serve in the army. For them, too, the tight link between security and labor market opportunities can be harmful.

One concrete example emerges from research on the occupational life of Bedouin professional middle-class women. Abu-Rabia-Queder notes that in Jewish public spaces in Israel, Arabic is labeled as the language of the enemy; anyone speaking Arabic is marked as hostile or as threatening.³⁷ The requirement to speak only Hebrew, and at times to conceal Arab identity altogether, becomes a major obstacle for Arab women in the labor market, even when they belong to the well-educated professional middle-class.

These findings attest to the securitization of the civilian public sphere in Israel. Amir and Kotef explain that the security paradigm is based on a “normality” principle, and is thus prone to identify as suspicious and even as potentially threatening any deviation from given norms.³⁸ Although Amir and Kotef’s analysis applies to the securitization of activism against the occupation in the West Bank, the above examples demonstrate how the logic of securitization has penetrated the labor market and the public sphere in general, with clear implications for women’s occupational opportunities.

Women in the private sphere

In studying everyday family life, Hanna Herzog argued in 2004 that the Arab–Israeli conflict helps entrench familyism in Israel.³⁹ Analyzing discursive practices (books and radio programs) as well as non-discursive practices such as visiting military bases, laundering soldiers’ uniforms and cooking special dishes for them, she demonstrates that “parenthood” implicitly takes for granted its identification with the woman’s world and gender-divided roles. While parenting a soldier is supposedly gender-neutral, in practice it is performed almost exclusively by mothers, thus further confirming two aspects: the centrality of the military as a cornerstone of men’s masculine identity; and the centrality of the family as a cornerstone of women’s feminine identity.

This encounter between the two institutions – military and family – reproduces the gendered division of roles in Israel. Herzog’s analysis shows that the centrality of the military has been a cornerstone of men’s masculine identity, and the centrality of the family a cornerstone of women’s feminine identity. The encounter of the two institutions has become a mechanism that reproduces the gendered division of roles in Israel.

Like the family structure under militarism, gender identities in militarist societies have been studied extensively: both the construction of gender identities of women soldiers⁴⁰ and the power of militarism to shape gender identities outside of the military.⁴¹ In Israel, due to conscription, the “normative” transition to adulthood of both men and women takes place within a hyper-masculine, hierarchical and total institution. Therefore, military service has differential consequences for the identity formation of men and women.⁴² While men’s gendered identity is constituted within an institution that encourages aggressive masculinity, women learn during their service mainly about their marginality. Outside the military, men continue to reap the masculine fruits of militarism, while women are identified with weakness and family life.

However, this is a very general statement, since different groups of women shape various gender identities in the military according to their ethno-class background and their military role. Thus, some women have been able to construct an identity that refuses the militaristic culture and resists the macho norm, the motherhood imperative or the heterosexual norm altogether. They manage to do so even though their identities, too, are all constructed in one way or another in relation to the hegemonic hetero-normative image of the warrior and the mother in need of

protection.

In this context, we also need to look at the gendered consequences of armed conflict itself. Commissioned by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) to assess the impact of armed conflict on women and their role in peace building, in 2002 Elisabeth Rehn and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf found that men and women experience wars in different ways.⁴³ Though more men are killed than women, the latter rarely have the same resources, political rights, authority or control over their environment and needs as do men. In addition, caretaking responsibilities limit their mobility and ability to protect themselves.

This is also true in Israel, where for the past 30 years military clashes have not only endangered soldiers but also involved civilians on the home front. Especially instructive, in this context, is a recent study by Sachs, Sa'ar and Aharoni of the impact of armed conflict on women in Israel during the second *Intifada*.⁴⁴ They found that in ongoing conflict women's vulnerability is exacerbated by economic disempowerment and by their caretaking responsibilities. Poverty, minority status and gender/sexual injuries exacerbated trauma that resulted from attacks motivated by national strife.

Thus, using the intersectional toolbox, we argue that a woman's specific location affects her vulnerability to armed conflict and militarism. Specifically, women from socio-geographically peripheral locations and Palestinian women in Israel are more deeply affected by the centrality of militarist discourses and practices. These women are more vulnerable to situations of war, to the widespread militarist thinking and to the logic of security.

However, if we shift our gaze to groups of middle-class Jewish women, we can detect a different pattern of relations between women and militarism.

Part 2: The counter-argument

Powerful women: intersectionality as a recourse

Having established how militarism and the logic of security often benefit men and can oppress women and compromise their interests, we now propose a counter-argument, according to which militaristic societies can be inclusive and even empowering for women of certain social groups as a result of specific intersectional politics. This argument refuses to view women as passive, or as merely victims of armed conflicts, and portrays them as capable actors.⁴⁵ In other words, using a political intersectional framework to “combat synergistic and formidable structures of subordination,”⁴⁶ we argue that some groups of women *can* identify with the logic of security, *do* join militaristic institutions or use the militaristic discourse in ways that *do* grant them socio-political power.

Isaac Reed’s three-fold presentation of relational, performative and discursive dimensions of power serves as the basic categorization for understanding what constitutes power.⁴⁷

Relational power refers to a person’s advantaged or disadvantaged position in the social structure.

Using the relational dimension, we wish to untangle the different positionalities of women of diverse intersectional identities. Namely, the difference between Israeli women who possess some power (mostly middle-class Jewish women), and those who possess less power, a category consisting principally of lower-class Jewish women and Palestinian women.

Discursive power reflects the symbolic order and reveals how the security discourse embeds itself in the public and private spheres.

Using the discursive dimension, we wish to untangle how women employ power against specific narratives and social understandings of their “proper” place.

Performative power relates to “how situated action and interaction exerts control over actors and their future actions.”⁴⁸ The performative dimension marks situations in which social power enables political transformation via public spectacles that make someone act in ways they would not otherwise do. We apply the performative dimension in order to unravel distinct performances women perform in order to be included in the militarized public sphere.

In Israel, participation in security-related work and in the military in particular has become a principal pathway for women to prove, but also to experience, their belonging to the national collective. This “militarization of belonging” has gained social acceptance especially in the last two decades, with the rightward shift of Israeli politics in 1977, and the intensification of violent conflicts along Israel’s borders. As a reaction to the ongoing security threat, today many women “join” the militarist discourse and institutions out of identification with growing nationalist sentiment.

Women’s enlistment also needs to be viewed from this perspective. Even though women are conscripted by law they can easily obtain exemption; and indeed 42.7% of all Jewish women liable for the draft are granted service exemptions (compared to 27% of men).⁴⁹ Women’s military service then becomes a form of volunteering. Women enlist out of a feeling of national duty, because they realize that military service is a way to achieve respectability, and in some cases even achieve power by being included in the national collective. At the same time, the military has opened up more roles for women and offered them more challenging opportunities

for self-fulfillment and promotion, thus encouraging women's enlistment.

Indicative of women's desire to be included in the militarized national collective is the new phenomenon of religious women who choose to enlist despite the prohibitive edicts of their rabbis. Young national-religious men tend to view military service as a constitutive element in their life course, and their presence in combat units far exceeds their proportion in the overall number of servicemen. National-religious women, on the other hand, are cautioned by their rabbis not to enlist out of fear that in the military they will compromise their modesty or abandon their religious way of life altogether. Nevertheless, between 2010 and 2016, the number of religious young women in uniform skyrocketed by 250 percent.⁵⁰ For many of them, the goal is to prove that, like men, they too are committed to serve the state. At the same time, enlistment is a way of expressing objection to the religious establishment and their identification with the wave of religious feminism in Israel.⁵¹

However, we should note that the experience of women's military service is not unified but varies along ethnic and class lines. Women from lower-class backgrounds still serve in traditionally feminine, non-prestigious roles, and primarily perform clerical functions.

Middle-class women, on the other hand, often serve in prestigious, relatively gender-neutral roles such as military intelligence, or in non-traditional and high-status roles such as tank and infantry instructors. For the latter group, military service provides professional training and even opens the door to lucrative high-tech employment in the post-service market. For them, conscription contributes to their civic status and their perception as equal citizens and enhances the career prospects of middle-class women.

Importantly, due to the militarization of Israeli society as a whole, women's identification with the security logic is not limited to military service. One of the main manifestations of this phenomenon is the rise of powerful right-wing women MKs. In the past, most women in the *Knesset* represented center or left parties with an ideology of gender equality. However, the past 15 years have witnessed a significant increase in the total number of women MKs (from nine in 1999 to 34 in 2018), many of whom represent right-wing parties. Some now serve in senior political positions, as do Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, Minister of Culture and Sport Miri Regev, Minister for Social Equality Gila Gamliel and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Hotovely. By joining the discourse of security, these women have attained real political power and prestige.

These women parliamentarians have gained not only relational but also performative power in understanding that being part of the national camp and holding a militarist ideology empowers them. Moreover, they use their identities and positionalities (specifically Jewish religion and nationalism) to situate themselves within an intersectional map, not in a subordinate position or under a regime of inequality. That is, they use the same intersectional location to embody an opposite position on the axes of power, one of agency, dominance, leadership and influence.

Motherhood serves as special justification of and legitimacy for women's participation in militarism. For example, bereaved mothers have a special social prominence and even political power in Israel. Miriam Peretz, a bereaved mother who was in 2018 awarded the prestigious Israel Prize "for Lifetime Achievement and Special Contribution to Society and the State," has attained social and political status due to the tragedy of losing two sons in wars. Another example is the social movement "Four Mothers," whose members in the late 1990s based much of their right to demand that the Israeli Government withdraw the IDF from southern Lebanon on the fact that they were mothers of combat soldiers. This basis of legitimacy enabled women to partake in the public sphere but confined the legitimacy and framing of their participation to the

narrow and traditional framework of motherhood.

Israeli “homonationalism”⁵² provides a very different indication of how a group of people can use their power to rework their (group) position within the power structure in order to gain social legitimation, national inclusion and formal equality. Most LGBT individuals in Israel serve in the military, and for many of them identification with the state and with the nation is a given.⁵³ Moreover, some LGBT individuals are involved at the highest levels of national politics, including in the right-wing *Likud* party. The coupling of LGBTs with nationality and normativity is indicative of a process of inclusion of some LGBT individuals within mainstream society, which involves adopting hegemonic ideology and militarist discourses.

An interesting phenomenon demonstrating how, like LGBTs, women can also leverage their military participation as a source of legitimacy for political voice, comes from the other side of the political spectrum, from testimonies women soldiers have given to the NGO named “Breaking the Silence” (founded in 2004 by IDF veterans in order to disclose Israeli military misconduct in the occupied Palestinian territories). Traditionally, women, in Israel and elsewhere, have based their antiwar protest on “republican motherhood,” which is the notion that while men earn their citizenship through contribution to the collective’s security, women belong to the national collective through their roles in reproducing and caring for the next generation. As noted above, republican motherhood served as the main source of power for the “Four Mothers” movement. Women’s military service, on the other hand, was still not acknowledged as a basis for antiwar protest.

In 2010, however, “Breaking the Silence” published testimonies of women soldiers who served in the occupied Palestinian territories. For the first time, women’s military service leveraged into a political voice challenging military policies, showing how women can use their military service as a source of symbolic capital that can legitimize political criticism.⁵⁴ Even though their initial ability to speak in public is a result of their privileged positionality in the first place (i.e., their relational power), they choose to mobilize it and create performative power that transforms their identities as women and gives them authoritative, critical public voice.

Conclusion

Against the conventional wisdom that militarization and the logic of security are always “bad for women,” we have here proposed a modifying argument, and a counter-argument, both inspired by the intersectionality framework. The political intersectionality approach calls upon us to look at how diverse groups of women relate differently to nationalism, to the state and to militarism. Thus, the modifying argument is that marginalized groups in Israel, and in particular non-Jewish groups, are more vulnerable to the damage inflicted by wars, militarist ideology and discourse, and militarist institutions.

At the same time, Jewish middle-class women can also find themselves on the margins of the military, the margins of the labor market and the margins of the political sphere, since the logic of security empowers Jewish men disproportionately in all these profoundly interrelated arenas. Securitism is always gendered, and the monopoly of security over the public sphere preserves men’s hegemony, which pushes women once again to traditional roles of caring within the domestic, private sphere.

The counter-argument is that at the same time, some women, especially Jewish middle-class women, can actually reap the benefits of militarization. In the last two decades, the military has

opened up prestigious roles for women. The political sphere has accepted more women who have then gone on to gain political power. Even women's protest against the occupation is now empowered by military service.

Thus, militarization provides more and more Israeli women with ways to belong to the collective, to accrue socio-political power and sometimes to use it against the policies of the military-industrial complex. Adopting a political understanding of intersectionality⁵⁵ reveals a far more complex Israeli web of power-distribution and power-sharing than is generally assumed. Intersectional positions produce inequality and subordination for some women, but also offer the potential to mobilize relative power for others.

Ze'ev Lehrer argues that the Israeli militaristic gender regime is not an integrated, coherent structure but, rather, a highly dynamic field operating under the influence of conflicting pressures and opposing forces.⁵⁶ On the one hand, liberal women's organizations and lobbies along with bureaucratic forces (human resource needs) are driving towards greater equality for women in the military. On the other hand, religious and chauvinist forces are pressing for the maintenance of a clear gender order based on the dominance of the masculine image of the combat soldier. This ongoing encounter between competing forces has created a diverse, multifaceted map of the integration of women and various forms of equality and inequality in different internal settings.⁵⁷

In the same vein, we argue that state ideology such as militarism does not construct a coherent gender regime, and therefore should not be viewed as a monolithic entity shaped top-down. Rather, we should "uncover how states are differentiated entities, composed of multiple gender arrangements."⁵⁸ This multiplicity leaves room for women to actively employ power positions or militaristic discourses, choosing to take part and work with power, rather than to be passively subordinated, restricted or produced by it. Consequently, we conclude that the state's militaristic ideology and practices create varied opportunities, and not just obstacles, for different intersectional groups of women, thereby generating diverse encounters with its institutions.

While the gender gap persists, large groups of (Jewish) women refuse to see themselves as victims of securitism. They are learning to benefit from the power it grants its followers. The contours marking the boundaries of power conform to the power dimensions Reed portrayed, in which, in order to gain or hold power some women have to be placed in a better position than others (relational power).

Making a stand either for or against, women need to be heard and to take part in the militarist discourse (discursive power). Finally, they need to use their power and perform social sensations – "acts that transform the emotions"⁵⁹ – to draw attention in extreme ways (performative power). However, it is not easy to achieve these results, even in present conditions of gradually growing equality. Still restricted by their place within a militarist order, most Israeli women are unable to benefit as yet from this relative power position.

In this chapter, we have described an emerging situation in Israel that mixes both conservation (the modifying argument) and change (the counter-argument) of women's status under militarism. Ultimately, left to be determined is whether such change can create actual liberating opportunities for women that might lead to the end of militarism itself, or that might promote gender equality in Israel. In other words, the question that lingers is whether women who attain power through militarism will mobilize and change the militarist culture as a fundamental force in the oppression of women and other marginalized sectors in society?

Notes

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The economics of prioritizing security

Ben-Zion Zilberfarb

How to apportion national economic resources between military and civilian sectors is a dilemma that challenges many countries. This chapter analyzes the ways in which Israel has handled its 70-year security burden, made especially acute by the need to confront continuous threats from enemies both near and far.

We begin by defining the economic component of Israel's defense burden and thereafter survey its development between 1948 and 2018.

In separate sections, we then discuss: first, the role of US military aid in Israel's defense budgeting during that period; and second, the defense budget's positive "spillover" effects. In the final section, recalling how Nobel Laureate Paul Samuelson chose to open his 1948 canonical work, *Economics: An Introductory Analysis* with the "guns vs butter" dilemma as a prime example of the problem of resource allocation, we demonstrate how it has generated successive debates in Israel between the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF).

The "defense burden"

The defense burden is usually measured as defense consumption divided by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) or by total resources (GDP + imports). Of the few definitions for the term "defense consumption" provided in the literature, this chapter adopts that which refers to government defense consumption expenditures (GDC) as comprising four principal components:

- 1 Compensation for employees. Under this heading come salaries paid to defense-related personnel (professional soldiers, conscripts and civilian employees of the defense ministry and the armed forces) as well as the payments in kind that they receive (food, clothing, tuition, housing subsidies, etc.);
- 2 Domestic purchases of goods and services for defense purposes;
- 3 Defense imports. In Israel's case, included under this heading is the value of military equipment supplied to Israel at no cost from US army surpluses. In 1979–1982, the United States also covered the cost of constructing two air force bases in the Negev, built by US contractors;
- 4 Sales by the Defense Ministry, including income from sales of surplus equipment in Israel and abroad, sales of services to the civilian market, etc.

However, a true calculus of Israel's total security costs requires that, in addition to the GDC, the following components be audited:

- 1 The economic cost of conscription;
- 2 The economic cost of reserve duty;
- 3 Expenditures for building shelters;
- 4 Expenditures for emergency inventories;
- 5 Security expenditures in civilian government offices;
- 6 Imputed costs of insurance for risks to personnel.

To these must be added expenditures resulting from indirect costs incurred by security personnel and/or enterprises. These too are debited to the national budget and, according to one calculation, together constitute 4% of the GDP (over and above the proportion consumed by direct GDC).¹

Prominent in this supplementary category are two broad clusters of outlays. The first comprises expenditures that figure in the national accounts under the heading of "welfare and health": pensions paid to retirees of the defense establishment; welfare payments paid to families of conscripts who are at the bottom of the income scale; and direct payments to bereaved families of soldiers killed on active service. The second cluster of supplementary expenditures covers institutional outlays in areas in which security and civilian components are intertwined. One example is provided by the government subsidies provided to Israel's principal defense companies: Rafael and TAAS (which develop and manufacture, respectively, advanced security systems and weapons for both the Israel Defense Force and the foreign market); and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI, formerly the Israel Aircraft Industry).² Another example: outlays incurred by the Israeli Civil Administration authorities on the West Bank (and until 2005 Gaza).

Some of these (the precise proportion defies precise calculation) directly relate to the maintenance of Israel's military security in the region. Others derive from the costs of providing health, education and welfare services to the local Palestinian population. The difficulties of differentiating between compound outlays that can be labeled direct security expenses and those civilian in nature are further epitomized by the costs of road construction in the West Bank. Although the primary purpose of these highways is to provide safe routes for settlement travel, they are also used by local Palestinian traffic.

Development of GDC 1948–2018

One of the principal characteristics of Israel's economic history is that its GDC (as above defined) has undergone substantial changes over time. Broadly speaking, between 1948 and 2016 it experienced six primary phases, here surveyed in chronological order.

1948–1950

The first phase lasted from the outbreak of Israel's War of Independence (which in fact began late in 1947, several months prior to the foundation of the State on May 14, 1948), until the conclusion of armistice agreements with Israel's immediate neighbors in 1949: Egypt on February 24, Lebanon on March 23, Jordan on April 3, Syria on July 20. Precise data for government defense consumption expenditures in this period are unavailable. However, it is

clear that the war presented policy makers with an enormous economic challenge, security-related expenses consuming (according to one estimate) no less than 50% of the national budget.³ For a country fighting for its survival, this figure is not unusual. During the Second World War, military expenditures in the UK and the USA reached a similar level.⁴ What made the Israeli case more challenging was that the security burden coincided with, and hence was greatly exacerbated by, the need to absorb large waves of Jewish immigration, which more than doubled Israel's Jewish population from some 650,000 persons in May 1948 to over 1.4 million by the end of 1951.

1950–1955

With the conclusion of the War of Independence, Israel's GDC entered its second phase. During this period, which lasted until 1955, the share of defense consumption dropped precipitously to about 7% of GDP. This reduction reflected not only the easing of military tension, but also the shift of national focus to immigrant absorption and the priority accorded to development investment and government civilian consumption.

Senior military echelons strenuously resisted the cuts in the defense budget which realigned national priorities imposed on the army. Indeed, after protracted bargaining, conducted against a background of a downturn in the economy in 1952, Lieutenant-General Yigael Yadin actually resigned from his position as IDF Chief of Staff at the end of the year, rather than be compelled into implementing further reductions in IDF manpower.⁵

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion remained adamant on the need to shift resources from military expenditures to immigrant absorption and economic development. His justification, finally formulated in 1953, was both clear and conclusive: "Our security does not depend only on the military. Non-military factors are no less crucial than are military factors. These include: the nation's economic and financial ability ... and above all the nation's unity and spirit."⁶ One of the more interesting aspects of this episode is that Ben-Gurion spoke, not just as Prime Minister, but also as Minister of Defense, a position he held with only one brief interruption from May 1948 until June 1963. As we shall see, in later periods the Ministry of Defense was to spearhead campaigns for increases in the defense budget, a position that brought it into direct confrontation with the Ministry of Finance.

1956–1966

The Sinai Campaign, launched when the IDF attacked Egyptian forces in the Sinai Desert in October 1956, led to a sharp increase in Israel's GDC, which doubled between 1955 and 1956. Over the same period, the share of defense expenditures in the country's GDP likewise jumped, from 7.4% to 13.5%. The distinguishing characteristic of this phase, which lasted until 1966, is that those high levels of defense expenditure were not maintained. Rather – and in sharp contrast to developments experienced after subsequent wars – they were soon curtailed. After the conclusion of the Sinai campaign, defense expenditures dropped by 32%, and their share in GDP declined to 8.7%, and then to 7.6% in 1959–1960.⁷ Only thereafter did defense expenditures (both total and domestic) resume an upward trajectory and increase by an annual average of about 14%. By the end of this phase, total defense expenditures averaged 9.3% of GDP while domestic defense expenditures averaged 5.7%.

1967–1972

Those figures changed dramatically with the outbreak of the Six-Day War in June 1967, after which defense expenditures jumped by 77% and their share in Israel's GDP rose, within just one year, from about 10% to 17%. This time, and unlike the post-1956 period, the upward trajectory continued. Large increases in the defense budget caused the share of defense expenditures in GDP to rise to a record of 24% in 1970.

On average, in the years 1967–1972 the share of defense expenditures and domestic defense expenditures in GDP was 19.8% and 11.9%, respectively (compared to 9.2% and 7.0% in the preceding period). That rate of growth is especially impressive when placed in the context of the overall growth of Israel's GDP over the same period, which rose by an impressive rate of about 12% per annum. In other words, defense expenditures were significantly outpacing GDP even at a time when the latter was booming. In real terms, both total and domestic defense consumption tripled between 1966 and 1972.

Several factors account for the large increase in defense expenditures after 1967.

One was the significant investment necessitated by Israel's control of the newly conquered territories (Sinai, Gaza and the West Bank), where new IDF bases had to be constructed, new roads paved and forces redeployed. Additional costs were incurred by the need to replenish military hardware destroyed during the fighting and to restock depleted inventories of ammunition and other disposable military equipment.

Another important spur was provided by France's 1967 imposed embargo on shipments of military hardware to Israel. At the time, France was Israel's principal source of military equipment, and especially of fighter jet aircraft. Indeed, French-made Mirage jets constituted the strike-arm of the Israel Air Force, having played a substantial role in the stunning victories achieved in the Six-Day War.

Because the embargo highlighted Israel's dependence on the foreign supply of major weapon systems, its imposition led to a reconsideration of government policy in this area. Ultimately, Israeli policy makers decided to develop an independent military industrial base (MIB) and thereby reduce the dependence of the Israeli armed forces on foreign sources of supply. Specifically, the new MIB was to manufacture at least one major system in such areas as armor, missiles, fighter jets and missile boats.⁸ The attainment of that target necessitated massive investments.

1973–1984

By 1972, Israel's top political and military leaders were confident the country had entered a period of reduced military tension. Reflecting that anticipation, defense expenditures declined that year by 6%, dropping to 19% of GNP. The outbreak of the Yom Kippur War in 1973 sharply reversed the trend, thus opening a new phase in the country's GDC. Between 1973 and 1976, the average share of defense expenditures and domestic defense expenditures in GDP were 28.0% and 14.5%, respectively. However, those figures declined somewhat between 1977 and 1984, and yet notwithstanding the 1979 peace treaty with Israel's most powerful enemy, Egypt, still remained high, at an annual average of 20.3% and 13.1%.

The persistence of so heavy a defense burden on the budget resulted from two new costs. One, expenses incurred as a result of the peace treaty, which required Israel evacuate the Sinai Desert (returned to Egypt) and redeploy IDF forces previously stationed there to the Negev, in southern

Israel, where new army camps, roads and air force bases were constructed. The other new outlay was the need to finance the campaign in the Lebanon, which commenced with an IDF invasion of that country in 1982 and extended into a prolonged occupation of its southern regions, until IDF forces finally withdrew in 2000.

1985–2018

The year 1985 had meanwhile constituted a turning point in Israel's economic history. Following the Yom Kippur War, the annual rate of inflation in the country skyrocketed from 56% in 1974 to 445% in 1984. In order to avert an imminent economic collapse, the Government adopted a highly successful anti-inflationary policy, the crux of which was a drastic cut in the budget deficit, the main cause of inflation, which during the previous decade had averaged 14.5% of GDP. That step was complemented by the introduction of new fiscal rules limiting the ability of the government to print money. Thanks to these measures, inflation dropped from 445% in 1984 to just 20% in 1986, a decline explained by the fact that by 1986 the government deficit of 14.7% of GDP in 1984 had been converted into a surplus of 1.3% of GDP.

None of these results would have been possible without massive cuts in the budgets of all government departments, including defense expenditures, which declined by 18% in 1986.⁹ All subsequent Governments have sustained that precedent of fiscal discipline. As a result, the respective 19% and 11.4% GDP shares of 1985 defense expenditures and domestic defense expenditures continued to decline to just 5.5% and 4.6%, respectively, in 2015.

US military aid

Without belittling the efforts of Israeli governments to curb defense spending after 1984, there can be no doubt greatly facilitating their success was military aid received from the United States in the form of loans, grants and equipment. Hence, it is to that component in the history of Israel's defense budgeting that attention now turns.

The formal genesis of US financial aid to Israel for military purposes dates back as far as 1959, when the US government granted Israel \$0.4 million in what was termed Foreign Military Financing (FMF). These sums gradually increased over the following decade, but remained relatively small and amounted to just \$277 million for the years 1959–1970 (i.e., an annual average of \$23 million). It is important to note that throughout, and until 1974, FMF came in the form of loans, granted however on very favorable terms, with repayment deferred for ten years. So, too, interest charged was lower than the market rate; and declined even more at the end of the 1980s, when the American administration permitted Israel to convert the more expensive earlier loans to bonds issued in US capital markets and, because backed by a 90% guarantee given by the US government, carried a lower rate of interest.

The year 1974 marked a watershed in FMF. For one thing, in response to Israel's military exigencies during and after the Yom Kippur War, US aid increased significantly. Secondly, some of the funds were disbursed now in the form of grants. Specifically, the average annual aid for the period 1974–1984 amounted to \$1,644 million, of which over 40% (\$718 million) consisted of grants. In a further step, in 1985 American FMF to Israel consisted entirely of grants. In 1985–1986, the annual averages of the sums involved came to \$1.7 billion, and from 1987 to 1999 to \$1.8 billion.

As from the turn of the twenty-first century, FMF received by Israel has increased even more. Initially, some of the increase derived from an arrangement whereby half of the economic aid previously paid to Israel – which had amounted to \$1.2 billion annually between 1987 and 1999 – would be converted into additional military aid (the remainder of the economic aid was phased out over a ten-year period). Thanks to this agreement, and to supplementary assistance, American military aid grants grew to \$2.4 billion in 2008 and incrementally thereafter, stabilizing at \$3.1 billion a year 2013–2017.¹⁰

In September 2016, the Israeli Government and the US Administration signed a new ten-year military package covering the years 2019–2028, during which period the total value of grants is scheduled to reach the enormous sum of \$38 billion. An official statement issued by the US Department of State described this as the largest military assistance program to a foreign country in American history. It came, however, with a number of provisos.

First, Israel had to promise not to ask Congress for any further increase in military assistance, other than in an emergency. Second, the agreement specified that the permission previously granted to Israel to use up to 26.3% of the aid for domestic expenditures (\$790 million per annum in recent years) would be phased out over the coming six years. Thereafter, all aid received is to be spent in the US and to be used solely for purchases of US-manufactured equipment. This clause discontinued previous arrangements, whereby Israel had been able to assign 13% of the aid – about \$300 million annually – to aircraft fuel imports from the US. It also necessarily implied that, in the future, Israel's Ministry of Defense will cut back on the ordnance orders that it places with domestic Israeli manufacturers and providers.¹¹

Noted, too, is that impressively large though the sums provided for in the new military aid program undoubtedly are, the actual rate of increase in the sums is more modest than initially appears to be the case. Included in the overall package of \$38 billion are grants for the funding of projects the US Congress had previously agreed to finance above, and beyond, the formal FMF programs (see Table 26.1 below). Within this category comes \$5 billion of the new package, now specifically earmarked for the development of anti-missile defense systems, a project previously financed separately.

Actual figures for overall US military aid to Israel (FMF plus Congressional additions) in recent years are:

In retrospect, the contribution of US military aid to Israel's security has been manifest in several areas.¹² The most obvious is *economic*. The FMF earmarked by successive American administrations has provided Israel with resources for military expenditures, thereby reducing the burden on its domestic budget. Indirectly, military aid has also alleviated the tax burden on Israeli society.

Even so, those figures must be placed in perspective. Thanks to the growth experienced by the Israeli economy, the specifically economic impact of US military aid has in fact declined over time. Thus, whereas in 1987 it may have amounted to 8.5% of Israel's GDP, by 1998 (notwithstanding a nominal rise) it had declined to 2.6%. That pattern repeats itself in recent years. Although reaching an all-time high of \$3.8 billion in 2016, American military aid then constituted only 1.2% of Israel's GDP.

In order to gauge the true impact of American military aid, attention has to be focused on two other functions it performs besides economic. The first is *military*, a sphere in which the importance of aid goes beyond numbers. Occasionally, as was the case during the airlift of US supplies to Israel during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, American aid has been crucial for Israel's survival. More regularly, it has provided the IDF with access to the most advanced weapon

systems in the world. Worth noting in this context is the fact that, at times, the US has supplied the Israeli Air Force with new aircraft almost concurrently with their delivery to its own troops. Moreover, in recent years, the two countries have increasingly cooperated in developing new defense systems, particularly in the area of anti-missile defense.

[Table 26.1 Overall US military aid to Israel \(FMF plus Congressional additions\) in US dollars, 2011–2016](#)

<i>Year</i>	<i>Congressional additions</i> <i>(\$ millions)</i>	<i>FMF</i> <i>(\$ billions)</i>	<i>Total aid</i> <i>(\$ billions)</i>
2011	415	3.1	3.52
2012	306	3.1	3.41
2013	448	3.1	3.55
2014	729	3.1	3.83
2015	616	3.1	3.72
2016	600	3.1	3.70

Source: Collated from Israel Treasury sources.

Finally, note must be taken of the *political* role performed by US military aid. It provides a powerful symbol of the United States’ commitment to Israel’s security – a commitment that is bipartisan in nature, as made manifest by its reiteration over the years by both Republican and Democratic administrations.

The “spillover” effects of defense spending

Enormous though Israel’s domestic expenditures on defense undoubtedly are, in some cases they take the form of investments which produce economic returns. To put matters another way, it is argued that some defense outlays have positive “spillover” economic effects. One example is technologies originally developed for military and security needs later adopted for civilian purposes.

Writing in the early 1980s, Aharon Gilshon (then a senior economic consultant in Jerusalem) contested that proposition on the argument that resources invested in military technologies would have produced an even larger economic return had they been invested *ab initio* in the civilian sector.¹³ The exponential growth of Israel’s high-tech sector since the 1990s (a phenomenon that Gilshon could not have anticipated, of course) seems conclusively to refute his claim, providing an indisputable example of a positive spillover effect produced by outlays in the defense sector. Actually, evidence of a similar nature had made itself apparent much earlier, immediately following the Six-Day War. As noted above, the French government then embargoed the shipment of arms to Israel, a pronouncement that triggered a decision by the government of Israel to strive for self-sufficiency by developing a military industrial base (MIB) of its own.

Consequent development of home-produced sophisticated military equipment provided the boost for a structural change in the Israeli economy, one so significant that it was later referred to as a miniature industrial revolution.¹⁴ That accolade was justified by the platform it provided for the rapid growth of Israel’s sophisticated electronics, optics and aerospace sectors, later known as high-tech industries.

Similar spillover effects meanwhile resulted from the IDF’s insistence it receive equipment of a standard at least equal to arms supplied to the neighboring Arab states by industrially

developed countries.¹⁵ In response, Israeli manufacturers of military equipment were compelled to introduce high-quality control standards in their production facilities. To employ highly professional and skilled labor for the production of sophisticated equipment. To import the sophisticated machine tools required for advanced production. And in order to adapt their weapons systems to changing military needs, to maintain high levels of investment in research and development. If necessary, they would be compelled to purchase technological know-how from foreign producers. In order to produce complete weapons systems, manufacturers had to ensure the managerial integration of specialized production processes in several plants. Finally, the government changed its policy and allowed a greater degree of involvement by the private sector in the production of arms. Even so, at the time of writing the majority of domestic arms supplies originate with government-owned enterprises.¹⁶

How many of these improvements exerted a simultaneous effect on other industries remains unclear. In the longer run, however, the positive spillover effects are very much apparent. Many of the scientists who led the spectacular growth of high-tech industry in Israel during the 1990s received their training and experience in the military industrial sector. Many veterans of the army, especially of the intelligence unit 8200 have used skills, developed during their army service, to form start-up companies that have been a driving force behind Israel's growth over the last two decades.¹⁷

The growth of military exports is yet another positive spillover effect. The development of a sophisticated military industry, coupled with the fact that much of its products were "tested" in real combat, facilitated the export of Israeli military equipment to foreign markets.¹⁸ Official figures in this area are hard to obtain. However, according to an annual report on the global weapons industry, published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Israeli military exports in 2016 were valued at \$7.9 billion. Moreover, three Israeli defense contractors (Elbit Systems Ltd., Israel Aerospace Industries Ltd. (IAI), and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems Ltd.) were listed among the world's 50 largest manufacturers of weapon systems.¹⁹

The ongoing debate: Ministry of Defense vs. Ministry of Finance

In Israel, as elsewhere, determination of required (or permissible) levels of defense spending is always a source of debate, much of it conducted in public, sometimes fiercely so. It also involves multiple participants; the principal protagonists – usually also fierce bureaucratic antagonists – not unexpectedly, are the MOD on one hand, and the MOF on the other. Add to this, positions on the defense budget, taken by representatives of the IDF (who invariably side with the MOD), Cabinet ministers, officials in the Prime Minister's office, *Knesset* members and figures in the domestic defense industries. Each of these groups attempts, to one degree or another, to enlist the support of the media for its own point of view, thereby adding journalists and media pundits to the list of "players" in the budgetary debate.²⁰

Since the MOD and MOF usually fail to iron out their differences over budgetary priorities, the Prime Minister is invariably constrained to negotiate a compromise between their rival positions. Once he or she does so, the agreement reached is ratified by the Cabinet and the *Knesset*, with none of the other parties exerting more than minimal influence on its final form.²¹

Over the last 15 years, the decision-making process has been significantly modified by the appointment of various committees of experts to examine individual aspects of defense

expenditures. The initiative for this departure was taken by the IDF and the MOD, which between 2003 and 2006 commissioned three separate enquiries: into the feasibility of modifications to Israel's current system of conscript service (2003); into the military reserve structure (2004); into the duration of conscript service (2006). Subsequently, the MOD appointed another committee to examine existing retirement arrangements for the professional segment of the IDF

Still more relevant to the present discussion are the deliberations and conclusions of two other committees, which received their commission from the Prime Minister as well as the MOF and the MOD. Also distinctive was their mandate. Instead of being asked to investigate a specific segment of defense expenditures (such as personnel), these two committees were asked to examine the appropriate size of the military budget as a whole.

The first body to do so was the Brodet Committee, appointed in November 2006 and named after its chairman, David Brodet, whose extended experience of government service included one stint as Budget Director in the Ministry of Finance (1991–1994) and another as its Director General (1995–1997). The Brodet Committee's report, published in May 2007, provided a comprehensive analysis of the defense budget, which it recommended be projected for two consecutive five-year terms, 2008–2012 and 2013–2017. In addition to that proposal, which was the Report's principal suggestion, it also recommended raising the retirement age for military professionals, and presented a formula for updating the proposed budget according to different price indices.

Brodet's guidelines for the defense budget after 2013 occasioned debates between the MOD and the MOF, which the two sides failed to resolve. Eventually (in May 2014), it was decided to appoint yet another committee. The chairman selected this time was Yochanan Locker, who had recently retired at the rank of Major-General from the IDF, where he had held various senior command posts in the air force before being appointed Military Secretary to the Prime Minister (2010–2012). His team (which included the author of this chapter) was mandated to recommend the size and the composition of the defense budget, taking into account the future effect it would have on the government budget and the strength of the economy.

Submitted in May 2015, the Locker Report contained 54 recommendations, most of which were accepted in an agreement signed by both the MOD and MOF in November 2015. The only significant exception was its proposal to establish a new retirement scheme for IDF professionals, only part of which was adopted. That setback, however, did not diminish the overall importance of the Locker Report, which accomplished at least three major breakthroughs. First, it set the retirement age for IDF professionals at 42 (a level lower than that recommended by the Brodet committee, but in line with that recommended by other bodies). Second, it programmed a reduction, by the end of 2017, of 15% in the IDF's professional complement as of 2015. Third, and most significant of all, the Locker Committee attached a specific price tag to the defense budget for the years 2016–2020, which it fixed at NIS (New Israeli Shekels) 59 billion annually. This sum was to be adjusted each year in accordance with changes in the consumer price index.²² Otherwise, it could only be altered were Israel to be involved in a war or enter into an economic recession.

Initially, prospects the Locker recommendations would take hold seemed favorable. After all, they met both the MOF's demands for a reduction in the defense budget and the IDF's proviso that any such cut it was prepared to concede during the committee's deliberations be made conditional on the promise of budgetary stability over an extended period. The national budgets for the years 2016–2018 passed by the *Knesset* did indeed accord with the Locker outlines.

Thereafter, however, clouds reappeared on the horizon. Citing the increased threat posed by Iran, late in 2017 Minister of Defense (Mr. Avigdor Lieberman, who had taken office in May 2016), announced his intention to demand an increase of NIS 3.6 billion in the 2018 defense budget, to be spread over a three-year period.

At the time of writing, that announcement has not been translated into a formal submission. Neither has it yet occasioned the sort of public spats between the MOD and MOF so common in the past. Ominously, however, informed media circles are already proclaiming a return to what one newspaper headline termed “The blackmail syndrome of the defense budget.”²³ More recently, industry has begun to exert pressure to increase future defense budgets. A study conducted by the MOD predicts that the cancellation of the permission to use a portion of US military aid for domestic purchases will affect about 600 manufacturers and lead to the loss of 22,000 jobs. Not surprisingly, the president of the Israeli Association of Industrialists has called on the MOF to increase the defense budget, so that the current level of domestic purchases be maintained.²⁴

These developments demonstrate just how far Israel still is from solving the dilemma of “guns versus butter” that Samuelson presented – coincidentally, in the very year of Israel’s birth.

Notes

- 1 Shmuel Ben-Zvi, “The Direct and Indirect Burden of Defense” (Hebrew), *The Economic Quarterly* 41 (1992): 227–232.
- 2 The “spillover” contributions that these industries make to the Israeli economy overall is discussed below.
- 3 Haim Barkai, *The Early Days of the Israeli Economy* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: The M. Falk Institute for Economic Research, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, December 1983, p. 62.
- 4 At the peak of World War II (1943–1944) the share of military expenditures in national income was 53% in the USA and 47% in the UK. See Mark Harrison, “Resource Mobilization for World War II: The U.S.A., U.K., U.S.S.R., and Germany, 1938–1945,” *Economic History Review* 41, no. 2 (1988): 171–192.
- 5 Arie Boaz, *The Origins of the Ministry of Defense* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Modan and Ministry of Defense Publishing, 2013, pp. 100–102.
- 6 Ben-Gurion’s review, originally composed in October 1953, was published in the Hebrew-language *IDF Journal Maarachot* (1981): 2–11.
- 7 These figures are close to those of South Korea (7% in 1960), but are much higher than in the EU countries (4.7% in 1960). Source: SIPRI.
- 8 Ariel Halperin, “The Buildup of Defense Force and Economic Growth” (Hebrew), *The Economic Quarterly* 37 (1987): 990–1010.
- 9 The decline in domestic defense expenditures was more moderate: 5.7%.
- 10 See Chapter 16, offering somewhat different figures.
- 11 As might be expected, Israeli manufacturers are starting to put pressure on the MOD not to cut its future domestic purchases. This development is discussed in the final section of the paper.
- 12 Yaakov Lifshitz, “The Future of US Military Aid to Israel” (Hebrew), in: *Economics and Security in Israel*. The Sirkin Lectures, 15. Tel-Aviv: The Jaffee Center for Strategic Research: Tel-Aviv University, 1999.
- 13 Aharon Gilshon, “Defense expenditures and economic growth in Israel,” in: Moshe Felber, Michael Michaely and Zvi Zusman (eds.) *Studies in Israel’s Economy 1982, 1984*. Jerusalem: The Israeli Economic Association, 1986, pp. 13–33.
- 14 Haim Barkai, “The Israeli Economy Since the Six-Day War” (Hebrew), *The Economic Quarterly* 39 (1988): 269–282.
- 15 David Kochav and Yaakov Lifshitz, “Defense Expenditures and Their Effect on the National Economy and Industry” (Hebrew), *The Economic Quarterly* 20 (1973): 256–270.
- 16 Two of the three largest defense manufacturers in Israel (Rafael and Israel Aircraft Industries – IAI) are still owned by the government.
- 17 For more on how Israel turned into a start-up nation see: Dan Senor and Saul Singer, *Start-Up Nation the Story of Israel Economic Miracle*. New York: Hachette Book Group, 2011.
- 18 For a thorough analysis of Israel’s defense exports until the beginning of the 1990s, see: Aharon Klieman, *Double-Edged Sword Israel. Defense Exports as an Instrument of Foreign Policy* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Am Oved, 1992.
- 19 Elbit’s 2016 sales amounted to \$3.1 billion, placing it as the world’s 27th largest manufacturer of weaponry. Israeli government-owned IAI was ranked 31st with \$2.6 billion in sales and Rafael was ranked 43rd with sales estimated at \$2.1 billion.
- 20 Zalman F. Shiffer, “The Debate Over the Defense Budget in Israel,” in: Gabriel Sheffer and Oren Barak (eds.) *Militarism*

and Israeli Society. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993, pp. 216–218.

21 See also Imri Tov, *The Price of Defense Power* (Hebrew). Tel-Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishers, 1998.

22 While different components of the defense budget are subject to different inflation rates, the recommendation was to use the consumer price index to avoid arguments over how to adjust the budget, as had occurred with the Brodet committee formula.

23 *Globes* (Hebrew-Language Daily, Tel-Aviv), November 20–21, 2017.

24 *Globes* (Hebrew-Language Daily, Tel-Aviv), March 20–21, 2018.

Jewish, democratic and resilient?

On competing visions of Israel

Yedidia Z. Stern

Introduction: the centrality of identity

National resilience is a product of multiple, mutually related elements. It reflects vital power dimensions that when combined convey the nation's ability to confront challenges. In the Israeli context, national resilience is the country's "Iron Dome," enabling it to contend with challenges both external – predominantly touching on legal, policy and security matters – and internal, reflecting social, political, national and religious tensions between citizens and communities.

Broadly speaking, national resilience comprises three components: *economic* resilience (the state of the economy, living standards, the availability of resources, innovation, and so forth); *social* resilience (affected by (in)equality, the availability and quality of education, health services, unemployment rates); and *political* resilience (regime stability, political participation, trust in government institutions, government integrity). Obviously, there exists a symbiotic relationship between these clusters and a resilient *security* situation. A healthy economy, a strong society and a stable political regime enable the sustained fostering of military power, which rests on all these components.

This chapter submits that identity constitutes an additional component of national resilience, one that is singularly critical in the Israeli context. The distinction of this component lies in its being intangible, focusing on personal and group consciousness rather than on material elements or on institutional structures. Although identity is an elusive facet of national resilience, hard to define and to measure, it is a crucial element in the mobilization of Israeli society into collective action in many areas, with security foremost among them.

As this book shows, security issues have been at the center of Israel's existence from the moment of its creation, when it confronted threats of immediate annihilation by surrounding states, until the present. Moreover, the security burden is borne by the average Israeli in any number of ways. Compulsory military service for men and women; reserve duty (mainly, but not exclusively, for men) for most of their adult years; a significant allocation of taxes and national resources to defense needs; and, most importantly – an unremitting awareness of living under a security threat both at the individual and the national, societal level.

Multi-generational steadfastness in these circumstances is not self-evident. While determined

by all the elements of national resilience, in my view this staying power nevertheless draws mainly on collective identity.

Central to what follows is the proposition that human beings are not isolated atoms, moving around unattached from their surroundings. Individuals, even in a postmodern global world, live within a history, a culture and group attachments they are either born into or have chosen. Nationality, religion and shared modes of behavior – crucial forces driving human history – join together individuals who share them while also distinguishing those persons from outsiders. In sum, identity is what transforms individuals into a cohesive group.

Some observers have tried to diminish the significance of these identity attachments by invoking a universal, humanistic, neo-liberal approach. They hold that, for individuals to be able to write their own narratives as they wish, they must be stripped of any garments of group identity. However, the resurgent power of nationality and religion in the twenty-first century, in both East and West, presents a counter-reaction to extreme neo-liberalism. As those phenomena demonstrate, people do wish to see themselves as part of something greater than themselves, a collective identity. They thus affirm the sentiments expressed by John Donne 400 years ago: “No man is an island/Entire of itself/Every man is a piece of the continent/A part of the main.”¹

My own view is that were the State of Israel made up of eight million islands, it would have collapsed long ago. My purpose in this chapter is to analyze the strength and weakness of the identity component in Israeli society. I shall do so from a single perspective: public attitudes respecting the *constitutional* identity of the state, defined as both “Jewish and democratic.”

A Jewish and democratic state – the conceptual tension

The Declaration of Independence, which is the State of Israel’s foundational document, refers to “the establishment of a Jewish state in *Eretz Israel*, to be known as the State of Israel.” The term “democratic state” is indeed absent from that text, but its essence clearly is incorporated in the Declaration’s pledge that “The State of Israel ... will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex.”

In 1992, 44 years after the publication of the Declaration, the *Knesset* enacted a Basic Law asserting that Israel is a “Jewish and democratic state.” This dual designation – “Jewish state” and “democratic state” – was transmuted long ago from a legal–constitutional discourse on *rights* into part of the public discourse on *identity*. In fact, Israeli society identifies the state as integrating both particularistic *and* universal elements embodied in its “Jewish *and* democratic” designation.

What, then, is the fuller meaning of this definition of the state in both its constituent parts? The question is important because, self-evidently, any decision regarding the breadth and depth of a “democratic” state impinges on the scope of the area open to influence by the values of a state that is also “Jewish.”

In interpreting the “democratic state” concept, we can rely on a large trove of intellectual knowledge and human experience, much of it disputing the breadth of democracy’s content. Some commentators confine democracy to formal “rules of the game,” to be used by a heterogeneous group when making decisions. Others conceive of democracy as an idea as well as an ideal, whereby the democratic state must be committed to a concrete political doctrine (for example, liberalism) and to specific sets of arrangements (for example, the Declaration of Human Rights).

Whereas alternative understandings of the democratic state's practical implications are not challenges exclusive or unique to Israel, the quest to define a "Jewish state" is entirely *sui generis*, and indeed has barely begun. For millennia, Jews lacked sovereignty; consequently, political experience does not figure prominently in the Jewish collective memory. This situation has created an enormous philosophical and legal lacuna regarding the meaning, the behavior patterns and values of a hypothetical "Jewish state." "Jewish" was invariably interpreted as denoting a people (a demographic criterion), a nationality (a national criterion) and a religion (a religious criterion). It is thus plausible to assume that a "Jewish state" is meant to reflect this diversity. A "Jewish state," in this conception, is one in which most citizens are Jewish, which is the national state of the Jews and has a Jewish religious affiliation.

Over the course of history, most Jews viewed these components as one integrated essence. Today, however, due to (a) secularization and (b) the establishment of the State of Israel, this tripartite identity package has come apart. Many Jews in Israel do not view people, nationality and religion as necessarily overlapping; at times, they even consider them to be conflictual. If so, it becomes necessary to determine the relative weight to be assigned to each one of these components in the shared life of Jews (and of the non-Jewish minority) in the State of Israel.

Extreme polar interpretations of "Jewish state" or "democratic state" only serve to fan controversy and impair national resilience. Thus, for example, a theocratic Jewish state drawing its authority from God's sovereignty is incompatible with its also being democratic (even as formally defined) and drawing its authority from human sovereignty. Conversely, a democratic state of "all its citizens," and hence non-discriminatory vis-à-vis national identities, is incompatible with the classic notion of the nation-state; and in the Israeli case – the Jewish state.

Nor does the problem end here. Even moderate interpretations of the two concepts create tension. The *demographic* criterion of the Jewish state concept hints at the state's commitment to undertake action deliberately aimed at preserving the Jewish majority through immigration and citizenship laws favoring Jews. The *national* criterion implies that the state's self-realization requires allocating rights and resources in a way that privileges members of the Jewish nationality. The *religious* criterion could compel a discriminatory attitude toward non-Jews and toward women, or impose religious obligations on Jews. Clearly, all three criteria evoke democratic unease. On the other hand, a liberal as opposed to a republican outlook that emphasizes the individual ethos while marginalizing the community or insists that the democratic state requires complete separation of religion and state, virtually precludes endowing the democratic state with Jewish content.

How does the conceptual tension existing between the two characteristics of the state Jewish and democratic manifest itself in the Israeli reality?

A Jewish and democratic state – the consciousness problem

Contemporary Israeli society comprises four main identity groups: (1) Jews who are secular (a category in which we here include traditionalists); (2) ultra-Orthodox Jews (*haredim*); (3) religious Zionist (Modern Orthodox) Jews; and (4) Arabs. All three Jewish groups live within a cultural duality in the sense that two civilizing beacons illuminate their world: traditional Jewish culture and Western liberal culture. Ostensibly, this cultural duality is potentially enriching for Israeli society. An asset, if used well. In reality, Israelis experience the opposite – a confrontation between the two beacons that is tantamount to a culture war.

In Israel's early decades – just a few years after the Holocaust, with the country facing

existential military threats – a relatively high level of intra-Jewish consensus characterized Israeli society. Israelis acted together on the strength of a covenant of fate or destiny that the era’s challenges made self-evident. Thus preoccupied, Israelis did not feel compelled to seek to define this covenant – the *telos* of Israeli sovereignty.

In 1967, Israelis were stunned by the sudden, swift and unexpected conquest of Judea and Samaria that many regarded as a “return to the ancient homeland.” Since then, the fate of the territories has virtually dominated Israeli conversation. For 50 years (almost three-quarters of Israel’s sovereign existence) debates over the future borders of the country have been obsessive. In their course, the national consensus has gradually crumbled and Israel has become a democracy in crisis. And yet the debate is hollow. The far more fateful question, which the political, ideological, religious and civil leadership chooses to leave unaddressed, is: regardless of the borders, what state and what society will exist within them?

In the absence of a serious conversation about a shared Israeli destiny, brash loud voices tend to dominate and further incite controversy. At one extreme stand zealots of liberal truth, who uphold a neutral democratic state allowing no Jewish expression in the public arena. For them, Judaism’s presence in public life corrupts politics, violates human rights, makes rational discourse shallow and diverts Israel from Zionism’s main course. They view their victory in the culture war as a vital *rite de passage* the country must undergo on its way to normalcy.

At the other extreme stand zealots of the Jewish legacy in its religious-*haredi* version, who advocate a Jewish state cleansed as far as possible from “alien” democratic influences. They view Israel’s adoption of Western cultural values as a forfeiture of national identity and betrayal of Jewish history, which empties the national revival of meaning. So entrenched are these positions that the realization of one side’s dream implies a nightmarish reality for the other.

This persistent culture war also tends toward the lowest common denominator, as evident in attitudes toward Israel’s self-definition as Jewish and democratic. One might have assumed that given three options regarding the state’s character – “a Jewish and democratic state,” a “Jewish state” or a “democratic state” – the Jewish public in Israel would unequivocally favor the first. Not only does it fit the definition imposed by Israel’s current constitutional regime, but as a compromise solution, it also precludes the necessity for choice.

Surveys, however, confound that logic. In 2013, only slightly more than a third of Jewish Israelis (37%) preferred the dual definition. Of the remainder, 32.3% favored the Jewish component and 29.2% the democratic one. A breakdown by degrees of religiosity, as defined by the respondents, point to sharp inter-group differences. A decisive majority of *haredim* (72.5%) and a large majority of the modern religious (65.2%) favor the Jewish component.²

While this 2013 *Index* asked Jews about their theoretical preference, a later survey, conducted in 2016, questioned their evaluation in light of the actual situation then prevailing. Only 26% of respondents maintained that the Jewish and democratic components were balanced. According to 45%, the Jewish component defining the state was unjustifiably heavy, whereas another 23% applied that judgment to the democratic component. Here, too, the stance of the *haredi* sector is pronounced; only 4% considered the Jewish component too strong, while more than two-thirds (69%) regarded the democratic component as unjustifiably heavy. A not insignificant proportion of *haredim* (17%) thought the two components appropriately balanced.³

When asked which of a number of topics constituted an existential threat to the country, 73% of Israeli Arabs identified demands to make Israel more Jewish as the primary danger. Israel’s continued control of the West Bank only took second place (57.5%).⁴

When results from more recent surveys dealing with the country’s character are compared

with those of previous years, findings point to a greater polarization – either “Jewish” or “democratic” – with the group preferring a synthesis between the two becoming smaller. Due to Israel’s demographic composition, escalating polarization is very much to be feared. Although *haredim* presently constitute about 10% of Israel’s adult population and Arabs about 20%, among first-grade children these two groups constitute close to 50% (25% Arabs; 22% *haredim*). Together with the religious Zionist group (15%), they represent close to two-thirds (62%) of future Israel. Hence, Israeli groups least supportive of integrating Jewish and democratic are those with the highest rates of growth. Should these two trends continue – the antithetical polar preferences of the *haredim* and the religious on the one hand, and of the Arabs on the other, combined with their high birthrates – demands for disengaging the two parts of Israel’s definition as a state will surely intensify.

The vision controversy

A key to understanding the roots of the identity controversy threatening Israeli resilience – and hence national security – is found in a constitutive speech delivered by President Reuven Rivlin in 2015.⁵ Rivlin then observed that demographics are restructuring or redesigning the very shape of Israeli society. They are creating a “new Israeli order” in which there no longer exists a clear majority, or clear minority groups. Instead, Israeli society is comprised of four population sectors, or, as he put it, four principal “tribes,” essentially different from each other, and growing closer in size: secularists, *haredim*, national–religious and Arabs. The members of these tribes differ from one another in various ways. However, for present purposes I want to emphasize that *they disagree on the State of Israel’s ultimate goals and on the proper interpretation of the Zionist movement as a whole. The depth of the controversy and its chronic nature constitute the central internal threats to the national resilience of the State of Israel.*

While quotidian challenges occasionally briefly deflect the controversy, reality revives it in all its intensity. This is true regarding religion and state, the future of Judea and Samaria and prospects for a peace agreement with the Palestinians. At root, the four rival ideological camps fundamentally disagree over the Israeli frame narrative. Each frames the relationship between Jewry’s Diaspora past and present renewal in ways that directly contradict the foundational narratives posited by rival camps. For instance, the three “tribes” clustered within Israel’s Jewish society fundamentally disagree about the aspects of Jewish identity molding the Jewish State

Some hold that political Zionism and the State of Israel are only justified when facilitating the continuation of Jewish existence as developed during the millennia of Exile. In this view, the Holocaust necessitated the creation of a state in which Jews might live safely and securely. However, the state is not authorized to adopt any position whatsoever regarding the essence of Jewish existence. By contrast, others view Israel’s creation as nothing less than an historical revolution regarding Jewish identity. For them, Jewish sovereignty implies a return to history that, in order to succeed, necessitates creating a “new Jew,” whose identity differs from that of his diaspora forbears.

These two poles of opinion – articulated, respectively, by *haredim* and secularists – crystallized prior to the creation of the state and during its formation. Then and now, a third group, religious Zionists, attempted to interpret the success of Zionism through a middle-of-the-road formula. Contrary to *haredim*, they do not interpret the state as a continuation of exile in the Land of Israel; and contrary to secularists, they do not see the state as divorced from Jewish

tradition that preceded it. Instead, religious Zionists ascribe religious value to Israel's creation, respecting it as an additional layer to Jewish exile, which managed to preserve Judaism as a unique way of life through traditional religious practice.

This ongoing controversy warrants closer attention.

Leaders of political Zionism in the generation of Israel's creation, especially David Ben-Gurion, argued that Zionist success required a new Jewish identity uniquely Israeli in character. They rejected the traditional Jewish identity created in exile as an obstacle to the emergence of a brave, pioneering, independent and sovereign Jew. Proponents of that position launched a "holy rebellion" calling for a national rather than religious identity; a state rather than communal organization; values of enlightenment and secularism rather than of holiness and tradition; and an orientation toward the future rather than to past memory.

It followed that since almost all post-biblical Jewish creativity took place in exile, it would be advisable to renounce products as no longer relevant. Instead of the corpus of *halacha* (Jewish religious law), philosophy and poetry that traditionally crowded the shelves of Jewish libraries, the state's founders sought to base Israeli Jewish identity on the historical narrative of the Bible. Consequently, everything between King David's time and David Ben-Gurion's time – the shaping experience spanning two millennia – was pronounced irrelevant for a nation seeking renewal.

Haredim, by contrast, did not ascribe any substantive importance to political Zionism. They sought not renewal, but continuity. For them, the "old Jew" represents the holy ideal, whose preservation is the true task of each generation, both inside and outside Israel. Instead of the *cultural revolution* sought by the secularists, *haredim* seek *spiritual evolution*. It follows that the State of Israel and the independence of the Jews are not the objective but merely an instrument for rebuilding the Torah civilization destroyed in the Holocaust. So, too, creation of the state is not a turning point in Jewish history; its influence on the quality of Jewish identity and culture is therefore insubstantial. Religious piety, ritual and the culture of learning, all conserved from generation to generation throughout two thousand years of exile and adversity, must continue to be zealously preserved in the Land of Israel even under secular control.

Religious Zionism, the third camp, views itself as a full partner in political Zionism, with equal rights and obligations. Like Ben-Gurion, religious Zionists are inspired by this historic opportunity for a Jewish sovereign nation-state and respect it as fulfilling a longstanding dream. According to many of this group's ideologues, the state – even a secular state – is not merely instrumental but endowed with spiritual, meta-physical value. It represents a stage in the larger process of messianic redemption that fulfills the divine promise to return God's people to its ancient homeland on the way to perfecting the entire world.

At the same time, like *haredim*, religious Zionists embrace the legacy of exile and dispersion. Their cultural heroes are the "Old Jews" – religious sages, pietists and leaders who kept the faith throughout the Jewish diaspora during the long course of Jewish history. Continuity between past and present is for them both natural and essential, as is the desire to embrace modernity and to re-enter history as a national-political actor. Little wonder, then, that theirs is a hyphenated identification, religious and Zionists.

Remarkably, all three groups succeeded in realizing their goals. Secular political Zionism created the strong, independent, modern, technological – and liberal – State of Israel. Unquestionably part of the Western world, Israel is in this sense altogether "normal," as Ben-Gurion had wished. Yet *haredim* have also implemented their plan to flourish within Israeli society while preserving their self-segregated lifestyle. The state indeed serves, from their

perspective, as a willing tool. It enables and supports the *haredi* community's spiritual and physical development to such a point that today's number of Torah students is higher than at any time in Jewish history. The same is true of religious Zionism: the movement has succeeded in moving from the periphery to the center of Israeli society; its influence on society and politics far exceeds its demographic weight.

However, the very success enjoyed by each of these groups in promoting its agenda has undermined the possibility of attaining consensus. Regarding the Israeli frame narrative, none of them is satisfied with a "little patch" of their own within the larger framework of Israel or is prepared to accept that the public space might "tolerate" or even accept them in a display of pluralistic openness.

Indeed, each bearer of these three distinct visions wishes to impose its Israeli frame narrative on society as a whole. Each operates out of a sense of "truth," of "knowledge" that history is on its side. Nor has there been any significant effort in the 70 years of the state to bridge these divergent visions. Instead, these parallel worlds exist, mutually alienated; each waiting for the inevitable moment it can defeat its ideological counterpart.

In the past, when secular hegemony was clearly visible, religious Zionists and *haredim* were cautious about promoting their vision too aggressively (except on religion and state topics). Today, however, as the demographics show – and as the "new Israeli order" articulated by President Rivlin suggests – each of these groups considers itself a significant part of society, on which it can therefore impose its vision. This is the deeper background of the undeclared culture war in Israel of the past decade, a war that has very real potential for impairing national resilience.

Not to be overlooked, beside the three narratives of the Jewish tribes, there is a fourth narrative supported by many among the 20% of Israeli citizens who are Arabs. This narrative and accompanying vision can be deduced from four documents drafted early in the twenty-first century at the initiative of Arab civil organizations. These texts discuss the future of the Arab-Palestinian population in Israel and proposals to change the very character of the State of Israel.

The most prominent among the documents, entitled *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*, was submitted by the National Committee for the Heads of the Local Arab Councils in Israel (the Arab sector's most significant non-political body), in 2006.⁶ This text states, *inter alia*, "defining the Israeli State as a Jewish State and exploiting democracy in the service of its Jewishness excludes us, and creates tension between us and the nature and essence of the state."⁷ In effect, then, it categorically negates the state's defined Jewishness. Furthermore, the statement reads:

Israel is the outcome of a settlement process initiated by the Zionist-Jewish elite in Europe and the west and realized by Colonial countries contributing to it and by promoting Jewish immigration to Palestine, in light of the results of the Second World War and the Holocaust.⁸

The leaders who signed this text thus unreservedly regard political Zionism as a tool of European–American colonialism, and do not recognize the deep link between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel; or at least ascribe no meaning to it as a compelling force in twentieth-century history.

In their view, true equality is unattainable so long as the state favors one national identity – Jewish – over another – Arab. They demand that all features of existence in Israel – sovereignty,

territory, norms and symbols – be neutral rather than Jewish. Not limiting their claim to civil rights equality or to national, cultural and religious rights as a minority group, they insist the Jewish majority erase its identity at the state level and preserve it only in sub-state contexts: communities, families and individuals. Their vision is thus incompatible with any combination of “Jewish and democratic” and strives to shape Israel as a state with a universal character: a “state of all its citizens” in one version, a “consensual democracy” in another.

In sum, we face a profound controversy over how to define the state properly. Whereas the vision of the *haredi* public focuses on its Jewish character, the vision of the Arab public negates this character altogether. As noted above, within a generation, together, these two groups will comprise almost half of all Israel’s citizens. The other two groups – the secular and the religious Zionist – are willing to accept some combination of “Jewish” and “democratic”; but their interpretations of this formula, and the due weight to be assigned each of its two components, are diametrically opposed.

Drawing closer

The above description of the dispute over a governing vision for Israel underscores the full meaning of President Rivlin’s “Tribes Speech,” in which he adds:

The “new Israeli order” is not a creative sociological differentiation; it is, rather, a reality with far-reaching consequences for our national strength, for the future of us all... . But, beyond all this, we must examine the social and moral implications of the “new Israeli order.” We must ask ourselves honestly, what is common to all these population sectors? Do we have a shared civil language, a shared ethos? Do we share a common denominator of values with the power to link all these sectors together in the Jewish and democratic State of Israel?

Thus, four disparate monologues exist that have trouble listening to one another. And yet, in observing Israeli society I detect inklings of a move toward bringing the various “tribes” closer on the basis of commonality and cooperation. Indeed, I venture to suggest that the peak of the Israeli controversy may be behind us. By no means do I argue that any of the four have renounced their separate visions but, rather, that enforced juxtaposition works to soften the controversy, so that the common good emerges with greater clarity for many Israelis.

The secularists

Again, taking each separately, secularism’s holy rebellion against Jewish tradition is long past its prime. Many secular Jews are uncomfortable, and even distressed, by the artificial detachment from the Jewish past,⁹ and are seeking recourse in the rich historical experience, memory and meaning of Jewish existence throughout the ages – for example, by selectively adopting various traditional Jewish practices, rituals and symbols, the Jewish calendar, and so forth. It is rare to find a car on Israel’s roads on Yom Kippur; almost everyone celebrates the Passover *seder*; 96% of Jewish homes affix a *mezuzah* (a parchment inscribed with Torah verses) on their doorpost. According to a survey of the Israel Democracy Institute, nearly 80% of Israeli Jews believe in the existence of God.

Also indicative are grassroot movements of Jewish renewal. Secular elites, at their own initiative, study classical sources drawn from the Jewish library of Talmud, philosophy, *Kabbalah* and more, to the point that today there are “secular *yeshivot*” and people interested in “Israeli Judaism.” And not only elites. Popular Israeli culture reflects a growing interest in texts Ben-Gurion and his contemporaries sought to devalue. Listening to Israeli radio stations reveals the popularity of the Psalms, of medieval poetry in Spanish Jewry’s Golden Age and of rabbinic homilies set to contemporary musical arrangements. Non-religious performers, accompanied by electric guitars, fill halls singing words originally written on parchment.

While these indicators do not signify that secularists are returning to religion or accepting religious law, what they do suggest is the end of the secularist rebellion against tradition and their sense of feeling “at home” with the practices of previous generations. They appreciate the value these roots have in consolidating their identity as Jews, both as individuals and as a collective. On the whole, understanding is spreading within Israel’s secular public that a society lacking a Jewish past and deprived of the culture of previous generations also lacks a future.

The ultra-Orthodox

Change is evident as well among *haredim*. True, ultra-Orthodox rhetoric remains extreme, attempting to preserve an insulated *haredi* existence “behind walls of holiness” through self-segregation. Most men still lack a basic general education, wishing instead to make *Torah study* their central, and even exclusive, life-long vocation. They do not share significantly in bearing the country’s burden – military, societal or economic. Beneath this surface of continued segregation, however, tectonic changes are taking place, possibly signaling a move by *haredi* society toward joining the Israeli enterprise.

In the past very few *haredim* served in the IDF; today about a quarter of their young men of conscript age enlist or perform some form of civic service (currently over 6,000). Approximately half of the males and more than two-thirds of the women now go out to work. What had been thought of as “a society of scholars” has turned in recent years into a “society of scholars and workers.” Despite denunciations by their religious authorities of higher education as a spiritual Holocaust “worse than Auschwitz,” about 11,000 trailblazing *haredi* men and women currently enroll in college programs. Likewise, notwithstanding their rabbis’ opposition, many use the Internet as an information highway, opening themselves to unknown opportunities of choice. True, the *haredi* community as a whole remains far from internalizing liberal or Western values; still a Rubicon has been crossed. *Haredim* are partners in national decision-making; identify *de facto* with the Zionist enterprise; and, succumbing to Adam Smith’s “invisible hand,” within a generation can be expected to transition from low socio-economic status to middle-class income levels.

These still modest beginnings encourage prospects for continued change, enabling a more harmonious integration of the *haredi* voice within the spectrum of Israeli identities. They cannot be expected to fully integrate with other Israelis. The “the walls of holiness” will not collapse. Nonetheless, some new blend of relationship is bound to emerge.

Religious Zionists

Post-1967 Religious Zionists interpreted the Six-Day War, which enabled Jews to return to lands belonging to the ancient Davidic kingdom, as clear proof theirs would be the generation of

promised redemption. This messianic fervor prompted idealist Religious Zionists to found settlements in Judea and Samaria, to assume leadership positions in the public sector and to stimulate the ferment stirring Israeli society. However, this forward momentum decelerated when successive Israeli governments felt coerced, after painful domestic struggles, to yield areas conquered (or “liberated,” in the religious Zionist version) in 1967, whether as part of a peace agreement or unilaterally.

As a consequence, the threat posed by a redemptive agenda that does not look history in the eye has significantly lessened in recent years. While the settlement enterprise in Judea and Samaria may still be ongoing, it now seems driven less by religious-messianic motivations than by national, security and economic considerations. Altogether, the messianic element is declining quantitatively (only about 6% of the religious Zionist camp) as is its influence over the religious public. Although most religious Zionists still largely adhere to their former right-wing (in Israeli terms) worldview, their viewpoints and preferences increasingly derive from a more pragmatic, down-to-earth analysis of concrete facts and realities. Hence, even if their understanding of reality differs from that of other Israelis, sometimes markedly, a “normal” discourse has become possible.

Israeli Arabs¹⁰

As noted, the vision documents formulated by the political, intellectual and religious leadership of Israeli Arabs call for the revocation of Israel’s Jewish character, demands with which a great many of this group concur. Fully three-quarters deny Israel’s right to be defined as the state of the Jewish people, while 80% hold that the state’s Jewish components unjustly outweigh those that are democratic.

These opinions aside, counter-evidence indicates a trend pointing to the surprising integration of Israel’s Arab citizens within Israeli society. A decisive majority (84%) of this group’s members are either “optimistic” or “quite optimistic” about the future of Israel; most (55%) are “proud” or “quite proud” of being Israelis; and a similar number (52%) hold that Israelis can rely on other Israelis to help them in times of trouble. Only 20% report fear of the Jews (as opposed to 65% of Jews who fear the Palestinian residents of Judea and Samaria). Their level of trust in the Supreme Court (52%) and in the IDF (32%!) is even higher than their level of trust in their own leadership (29%), which authored the vision document mentioned above.

Only 40% of Israeli Arabs feel part of Israel and its problems (vis-à-vis 84% of the Jews). Nevertheless, their sense of identity is compound. When asked to identify the most important elements of their identity, 29% chose religion, 25% (!) being Israeli, and 24% being Arab. Only 12% selected “Palestinian.”

As noted, Israeli Arabs overwhelmingly oppose the definition of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. However, this survey finding needs to be read in light of the fact that no Palestinian nation-state exists today. Findings show that 87% of Arabs in Israel support the two-state solution; should a Palestinian nation-state come into being, almost all Arabs in Israel (91%!) would support granting mutual recognition to Palestine and to Israel as the respective national homes of their two peoples.¹¹

In sum, anyone willing to ignore loud voices at the extremes and listen instead to midstream voices typical of each of the four sectors making up Israeli society will find reasons for optimism regarding the shared Israeli future. I do not mean by this that some wondrous deal can be envisioned, releasing us from the controversy over the fate of the disputed territories, or

awakening us from civil slumber. Neither do I deny the undoubted existence of voices and shadows weakening Israeli national resilience. However, the evidence does not justify the sense of a deep, irreparable social and identity rift. On the contrary, the Israeli identity controversy is currently abating. The internal discourse within each of the four main segments or “tribes” appears to be moving toward the center; simultaneously, the centrifuges distancing Israelis from one another are losing their destructive momentum. These two trends offer encouragement for Israel’s longer-term national resilience and staying power.

Conclusion

Asked how they are, Israelis most often respond, “personally, just fine.” This is actually a two-fold statement, not only about their personal feelings but by implication also about the general public or national situation. As confirmation, according to *The Israeli Democracy Index 2016* three-quarters of Israelis reported their personal situation to be “good.” In contrast only a third regarded Israel’s overall situation to be “good”; nearly two-thirds thought it “so-so” or even “bad.”

Objective evidence, however, does not support this pessimistic view. Israel’s security situation has never been better; its traditional enemies no longer pose an existential military threat. Its strong and stable economy safely weathered the global economic crisis of 2008 and has proven exceptionally successful in high-tech industries of the future. Its unemployment rates are among the lowest in the world. Politically, also, Israel’s situation is also improving. All these factors meaningfully strengthen Israel’s national resilience.

What arouses concern is that shared existence is “stuck”; that “togetherness” is flawed. For years, an intuitive sense of gloom has been quite pervasive – a mood of sourness and discouragement; a sense of self-criticism and of having missed out. The Zionist project, as it were, has lost energy, thrust and a clear sense of direction. This deeper awareness pervades not only the Israeli left but also the Israeli mainstream majority, as well as many on the right.

In this chapter, I have tried to show how these feelings originate in Israelis’ subjective perceptions concerning the appropriate vision for their country. All four sectors of Israeli society dispute the legitimacy of the state’s definition as “Jewish and democratic.” They even disagree as to meaning and content of those terms. Is this surprising? Not necessarily.

Before Israel’s establishment, Jews for centuries lived in communities dispersed throughout the world without having to bear full or even partial responsibility for public policy. Their geographic spread alone precluded their shaping a collective life as Jews, while enabling diverse Jewish identities to coexist. Moreover, being a subject people in exile Jews were not required, indeed not permitted, as Jews, to take decisions on any subject beyond their narrow, immediate family and community circles.

Political Zionism’s success and Israel’s creation therefore posed – and pose – a dual challenge for Jews unprecedented in their history. In the first instance, the Jewish nation-state is a central arena for sustaining Jewish life, in a country where Jews bear political responsibility, are cultural hegemony, administer public space and allocate public resources to its Jewish and non-Jewish citizens. In a word, the transition from communal life to state life has dramatically broadened their field of action as Jews. In the second instance, the existing political framework compels a shared policymaking process whose decisions are binding on all.

Even in the best of times and under ideal conditions, adjustment to these two innovations is bound to be prolonged. That Israel has had to absorb nearly half of world Jewry within a few

short, intense decades has exacerbated the difficulties of adaptation to sovereign life. Nevertheless, of late, it has been possible to discern processes that are bringing closer together members of the four central identity groups in Israeli society. The conceptual tension, the ideological arguments and the political struggles dominating recent decades may have been signs of a society experiencing the normal growing pains of adolescence and identity. Conversely, the current process of coalescence denotes the welcome transition from adolescence to maturity and a consequent strengthening of Israel's national resilience.

Notes

* This article was translated from Hebrew by Batya Stein.

- 1 John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions and Several Steps in my Sickness – Meditation XVII*. First Printing: London 1624.
- 2 Tamar Hermann et al., *The Israeli Democracy Index 2013*. Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2013, pp. 61–62.
- 3 Tamar Hermann et al., *The Israeli Democracy Index 2016*. Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2016, p. 174.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 105.
- 5 “President Reuven Rivlin’s Address on Concluding His First Year in Office.” www.president.gov.il/English/ThePresident/Speeches/Pages/news_070615_01.aspx.
- 6 The National Committee for the Heads of the Local Arab Councils in Israel, *The Future Vision of the Palestinian Arabs in Israel*. 2006. <https://www.adalah.org/uploads/oldfiles/newsletter/eng/dec06/tasawor-mostaqbali.pdf>
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p. 9.
- 9 These terms were coined by Gideon Katz, *To the Core of Secularism: A Philosophical Analysis of Secularism Within the Israeli Context* (Hebrew). Jerusalem: Yad Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, 2011.
- 10 Data in this section drawn from Hermann et al., *The Israeli Democracy Index 2016*.
- 11 Tamar Hermann and Khalil Shikaki, *Referendum: An Israeli–Palestinian Survey*. Jerusalem: Israel Democracy Institute, 2016.

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